

SO FEW GOT THROUGH

By MARTIN LINDSAY

SLEDGE (*53rd thousand*)

THOSE GREENLAND DAYS (*52nd thousand*)

THE EPIC OF CAPTAIN SCOTT (*15th thousand*)

SO FEW GOT THROUGH

*The personal diary of Lieut.-Col. Martin
Lindsay, D.S.O., M.P., who served with
the Gordon Highlanders in the 51st
Highland Division from July, 1944, to
May, 1945*

by

MARTIN LINDSAY



COLLINS

14 ST. JAMES'S PLACE LONDON

First Impression
Second Impression

April, 1946
June, 1946

To
THE INFANTRY COMPANY COMMANDER
British, Canadian, and American,
who played a greater part than
any other individual in the
liberation of Europe,
1944-45

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COLLINS CLEAR-TYPE PRESS : LONDON AND GLASGOW

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Line Drawings (by Lt.-Col. Frank Wilson)

Part One

FRANCE

July 12th, 1944.

IT BEGAN to-day with a telegram.

I have been spending a week with Bobby and Dorothy near Ascot. Dudley and Eve Tooth were also staying there. He and I talked about our prep. school, where "Tooth was swished by Beetle yesterday" was scrawled on a wall in the pavilion and reminded successive generations of small boys not only of the birching of the unknown Tooth but also of that legendary, gouty old tyrant, Hawtrey. Dudley tried to teach me about pictures, Dolly tried to improve my bridge, which nobody will ever succeed in doing, and *la belle* Eve inspired me to a birdie on the 18th at the Royal Berkshire, the last hole I shall play for a long time. So I left Kingsmead this morning a much better man.

We all drove up the Great West Road together, in Bobby's little car. I saw some duck flying very high and wondered what echo of war had disturbed their daylight siesta. We passed a long convoy—fresh landings on the French coast, perhaps? The porter at my Club handed me a priority telegram, which I had been expecting for at least a fortnight: "*Major Lindsay posted to 21 Army Group as a second-in-command will join 12 repeat 12 July at Virginia Water and report to Major Wellington.*"

While making my preparations I savoured in full this last morning in London. I took a last look round the Club, pinched some notepaper, and promised Alan Lennox-Boyd to ask for news of his brother, missing since D plus 1. I had a military haircut at a fashionable and unmilitary barber. When I get back I shall have the whole works, shampoo, friction, manicure, and whatever other extravagant titillations Mr. Trumper can provide. I left my best service dress with my tailor. Of course I had to tell Mr. Welsh that I was just off to France, and he was slightly sentimental. He showed me two tunics belonging to a young

officer of the Rifle Brigade which his mother had sent in to be cleaned before she gave them away. So I left him Joyce's address, in case I never call back for mine.

I walked very slowly up St. James's Street, sniffing the air like a young spaniel working up a hedgerow. A flying bomb streaked across the sky, but all the Southern Englanders continued about their business: two taxi-drivers were haggling over the price for a bottle of black-market gin, an American aviator smiled into the laughing eyes of somebody else's wife, in the bay window of White's an old man was reading a newspaper.

At Claridge's I went to telephone for a car to meet me at Virginia Water. Scribbled on a message pad I read: "Sally Lovelace has still not returned to her flat. They have not yet finished digging. We will let you know as soon as possible." But the bar was crowded. The restaurant was filling up, and soon there was not a table left.

There was another Alert at Waterloo Station, but the All Clear sounded at Twickenham. The train stopped for a long time in front of a village green. The slow left-hand bowler sent down two full pitches running. "Dear Daddy," had written Lindsay *ma*, "I think I like crickket." "Darling wife," I wrote then and there, "if I do not return I want you please to remember that the boys . . ."

When we arrived at Virginia Water I asked the A.T.S. driver if she knew where 21st Army Group was to be found. "No," she replied, "it's all so very hush hush. Nobody yet knows where anything is." "Well, Dolly told me at lunch that it's at the Wentworth Golf Club," I said, "so let's try there first."

Major Wellington had never heard of me, so there was much telephoning and searching for files. A lieutenant-colonel came into the room and they talked *sotto voce* for a while about the crop of adverse reports which had come back from France, against hitherto successful battalion commanders and brigadiers who had lost their heads when the guns began to fire. There was some mention of a new C.O. for 11th Scots Fusiliers.

"Why, what's happened to Colonel Cuninghame?" I asked, for he was just about my greatest friend. "I'm afraid he's gone," the major said. "He was killed three days ago." I felt very sad,

for Sandy and I were in the same company at Sandhurst and joined the regiment together

Wellington rang up France and tried to sell me to 9th Durham Light Infantry, but his opposite number over there was out. So he told me to "proceed" and get myself fixed up when I reached the other side. He also told me that I could borrow his staff-car, so, taking the wheel for greater speed, I drove up to London just in time for a last dinner with the Kingsmead house-party. They did their best to fill me up with drink, and one of them saw me off at the station. I am now half-way to a "south coast port," and perhaps it is the mixture of gin and Dubonnet inside me which has been writing all this.

July 14th.

The south coast port has turned out to be Southampton, and our ship, the *Prince Albert*, a small Dover-Ostend channel boat now employed for taking Commando landing craft to within striking distance of their objectives. Her battle honours—Dieppe, Licata, Reggio, Salerno, Ouistreham—are painted up in the wardroom.

We had a good view of the French coast as we steamed in towards it this morning: rolling grassfields sloping down to the sea from a ridge behind, and few distinctive features. I was struck by the enormous quantity of shipping of all types riding at anchor: cruisers, cargo vessels, tankers, lighters and many smaller craft; more ships than I had ever before seen in so small a stretch of water. No wonder that the Luftwaffe comes over most nights to lay mines.

We left the *Prince Albert* in a tank landing craft which steered for a large white pole not unlike a polo goalpost. At the foot of it a notice informed us that this desolate piece of featureless sand was King Beach. Stranded on the shore were several burnt-out craft which had blown up on land mines and a few tanks which bogged themselves in the heavy, clay-like sand. The only beach official appeared to be an elderly captain crouching like a cave-dweller in a lean-to made from ration boxes and tarpaulin sheets. He said that a car would be going to Second Army H.Q. in three hours' time.

So I went for a walk along the beach. The Navy were busy with jeeps and bulldozers salvaging derelict landing craft. There were no buildings to speak of in sight and they lived in dug-outs cut into the sandy hillocks just above high-water mark. The story of the D-Day battle was still written in the sand for all who could to read: the Germans occupying diggings at the edge of the beach had not been a first-class field formation, for the weapons they had left there were a miscellany of British and French equipment, no doubt captured in 1940. On the approach of the landing craft they had run for it—there were no empty cartridge cases, but on the other hand much hastily-jettisoned equipment at the foot of their trenches. Our men had been held up by heavy mortar fire short of these diggings, as could be seen by the number of holes, the edges of which were scarred in the path of the flying metal fragments and stained black from the bursting charge. They had thrown themselves to the ground, and there were handmarks where one or two had gripped the sand in who knows what agonies of apprehension. There had been casualties, for in several places one saw a more or less complete set of accoutrements—steel helmet, rifle, web equipment and so on—and alongside it the outline of the stretcher where it had been placed while the stricken man was lifted on to it. I could picture the scene: the men just landed, relaxing after the tension, loitering a bit, lighting a cigarette. So this is France; cushy, ain't it? Officers hustling around, sorting things out: "Anybody seen the Company Commander?" "Over here, No. 9 Platoon." "Come on, Corporal, get hold of your section and hurry up about it." Then suddenly the fearful cracks of bursting mortar bombs all round, and as one man everybody goes to ground.

It was a lovely summer day and I struck off along a path until I found what I was looking for—a Frenchman. He was an old man, leaning upon a hoe, and he told me that life had been hard during the occupation. German soldiers had been everywhere. Although the French along that coast had been all the time expecting us to land, the enemy were taken completely by surprise. Our bombing around here was very scattered and had killed few Germans, but nine French people. However, they

were terribly pleased to see us. I told him that I love France, that we will liberate the whole country, and that perhaps next summer or certainly the one after I shall return once again for my holidays. He straightened his back and looked away into the distance, towards the faint sound of the guns rumbling and banging away. "Maybe," he said. "But I am a very old man. I have seen two wars and now I have lost faith. All life is uncertain. *Mais je prierai Dieu de vous protéger mon ami.*"

I went on past a roadside cemetery. There were some twenty small white wooden crosses, mostly graves of officers and men of the East Yorkshire Regiment and Green Howards. Then I jumped a lift in a passing truck and came to a much knocked-about village, and there I found Ian Mackenzie, who had crossed with me, in a group of officers. We asked about the fighting which had lately taken place. Then one of them said, "Fifteenth Scottish Division is attacking to-night. They cross the start line at 1 a.m." This was a nasty shock for Ian, as his posting is to a Highland Light Infantry battalion in that division. He hurried off to the Town Major's office to try to borrow a jeep, and I felt very sorry for him being pitched into a night attack within an hour or two of joining.

My staff-car arrived. The driver said that many Frenchmen were not at all pleased when we turned their countryside into a battlefield; one of them soused him with a bucket of water as he sat there in the driving seat. After dark we reached a small tented camp in an orchard. Just now, as I was about to turn in, there was a beautiful display of flares and fireworks as the Luftwaffe flew over towards the beaches.

July 15th.

What an eventful day!

After breakfast I went across to the appropriate tent and reported myself. Before my identity was established I had a narrow escape from being posted as a Town Major in mistake for some other Lindsay. Then I said that I was particularly keen to get to the 51st Highland Division.

"Yes," said the Lieut.-Colonel, after thumbing through a file, "the Divisional Commander has applied for you by name. 153

Brigade—a Black Watch and two Gordon battalions—have lost a lot of officers in their last show. I think we can place you there.” He telephoned to the Division for confirmation, then showed me on a map where I would find their H.Q. “You have arrived at the right moment,” he said, “for 153 have come back into a rest area this morning. I will send you over in my car.”

I walked across to the survey truck to get a map which would guide me to my destination. Second Army H.Q. is dispersed in the grounds of a chateau. The garden walls are of an attractive near-Cotswold stone, but largely fallen down. The road to 153 Brigade was choked with transport of all kinds, as was the air with dust. Their H.Q., consisting of a few caravans, tents and slit trenches, was in an orchard near Benouville. The Brigadier, “Nap” Murray, a Cameron Highlander, had just begun to talk to me when there was a sudden swish and a bang, and a shell landed right in the middle of the orchard, causing nine casualties. Every three or four minutes for the next half-hour something landed pretty close. “God Almighty!” I thought to myself, “if this is a rest area, how can I ever stand the real thing?”

The Brigadier told me I would go to 1st Gordons. Their C.O. had been wounded two days ago and he had applied for Harry Cumming-Bruce, the second-in-command, to be promoted in his place, which would make a vacancy for me to step into.

At that moment Major the Hon. Henry Charles Hovell-ThurLOW-Cumming-Bruce, to give him his full title, walked in. He seems a charming chap; perhaps a slightly unorthodox military figure with his rather old-fashioned curly moustache, white framed horn-rimmed spectacles and slight stoop. He wears the St. John’s black medal ribbon, which caused much speculation among the troops when he arrived. He asked his servant what they thought it was, and the reply was, “Well, Sir, we thoct that perhaps baith your parents were killed in the blitz.” I hope to God he knows his job.

We went to the Battalion area. The companies were well-dispersed and dug-in, in some fields and scrub on the high ground overlooking the River Orne. 6th Airborne Division are holding the ridge beyond. All day they had been harassed by shell-fire in this so-called rest area, and Cumming-Bruce’s visit to Brigade

H.Q. was to ask for permission to move elsewhere. So we are now in some fields three miles away from there. It is quiet here and we can rest as long as it doesn't rain, but to keep the troops in good spirits a town or village is needed, a place where they can put on their best battledress and oggle the girls.

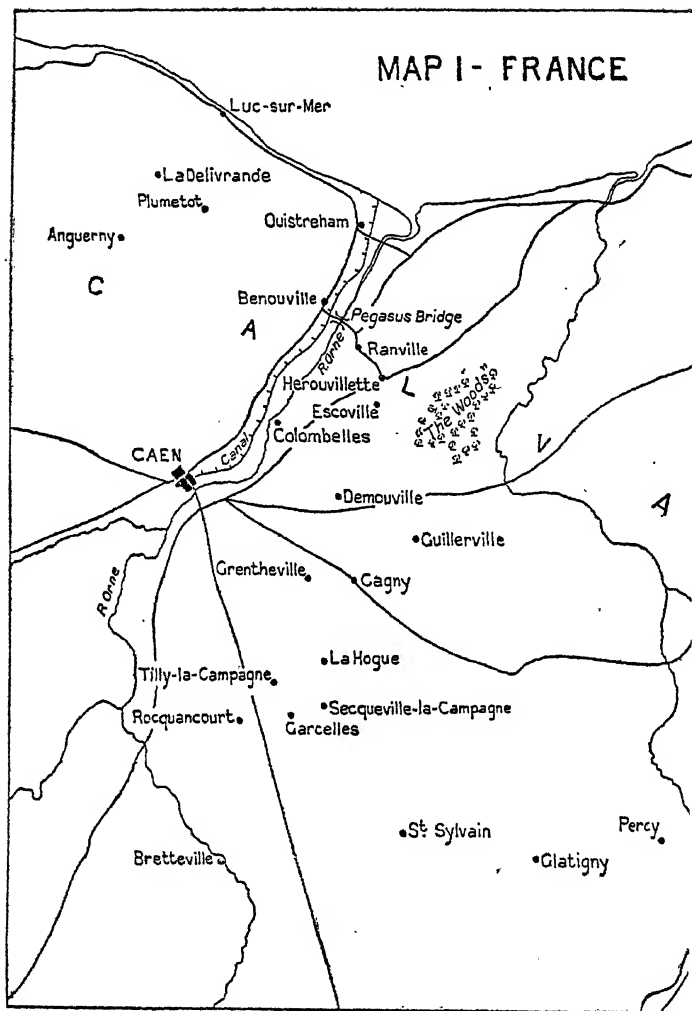
Cumming-Bruce has a small caravan made out of a captured ambulance and I have had a long talk with him inside it. He gave me the low-down on the Battalion. They have lost twelve officers, including the C.O. and three company commanders, and 200 men in the thirty-five days since the start of the campaign, without achieving very much. Two days ago they were ordered to take the Colombelles factory area, but it was much stronger than anybody anticipated and the attack failed miserably. He is rather worried about the morale of the Battalion. The continual shelling has made a number of men "bomb-happy." ("Bomb-happy," meaning shell-shocked or nervous, is a phrase much in use out here. Others I have not heard before are "duva" for dug-out or slit-trench, "brew-up" for boil up or burn-out, and "stonk" for a concentration of shells or mortar bombs.)

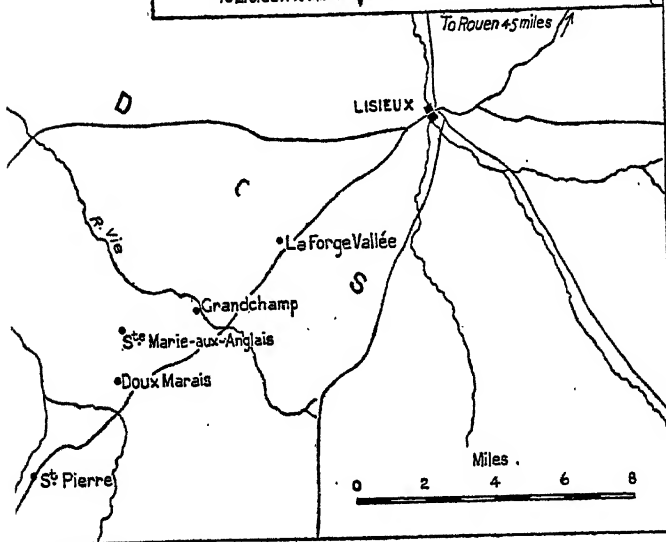
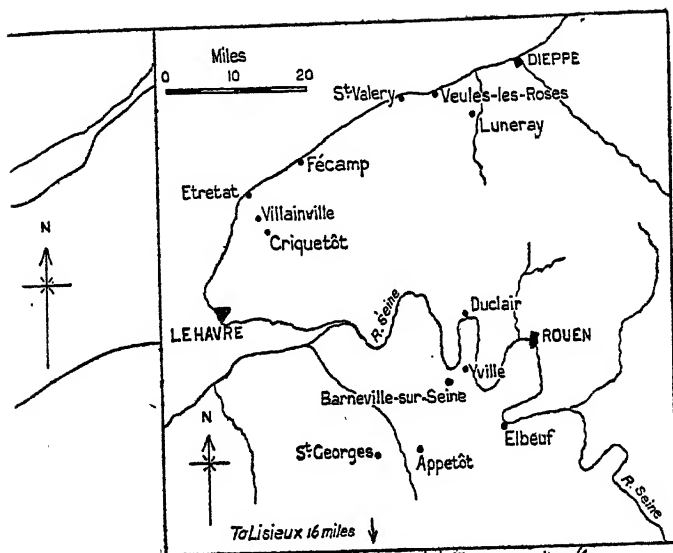
The Battalion has fought for thirty-four days and is now having three to four days' rest before the next show. Cumming-Bruce says that the Colombelles attack failed partly because the troops lack offensive spirit as the result of being too tired, too much use having been made of the Division. He thinks that the change of country will do everybody good. What they will appreciate most is that there are no trees here; everybody hates them as H.E. explodes when it hits a tree, which causes more casualties than when it bursts on the ground. Recently the Battalion spent some time in woods the other side of the Orne where there was a lot of shelling and mortaring. Because of tree-bursts, dug-outs must be made with substantial roofs.

I am very proud to be in this Division. The original 51st was (except for one brigade) forced to surrender at St. Valery in 1940. A new Highland Division was then formed in Scotland and in due course made a great name for itself in North Africa and Sicily. It was brought back from Italy to England early this year in order to take part in the present campaign.

The Division consists (apart from the supporting arms and

MAP I - FRANCE





services such as R.A., R.E., R.A.M.C., R.A.S.C., etc.) of the five Highland regiments, the Black Watch, Seaforths, Gordons, Camerons, Argyll and Sutherlands. The three Brigades are 152 (5th Camerons and 2nd and 5th Seaforths), 153 (5th Black Watch and 1st and 5-7th Gordons) and 154 (1st and 7th Black Watch and 7th Argyll and Sutherlands). All five regiments have magnificent traditions.

I shall have to read up the history of the Gordon Highlanders. All I can remember is that the regiment was raised by one of the Dukes of Gordon whose crest, the stag's antlers above the ducal coronet, is worn as a cap badge to this day. His Duchess, Jean, is said to have allowed all would-be recruits to take the King's shilling from between her lips with a kiss. They were Sir John Moore's favourite regiment, and when he chose his coat-of-arms he had the figure of a Gordon Highlander in full dress as one of the two supporters. When he was killed it was a bearer party from the regiment which carried him to the grave, and their white spats still have black buttons in mourning for this sad day. Most people must have seen Lady Butler's famous picture, "Scotland for Ever," showing the charge of the Gordons, holding on to the leathers of the Scots Greys, at Waterloo. Later the regiment gained great renown in an attack on the heights of Dargai, on the Indian Frontier, in which Piper Findlater won the V.C. for playing the regimental march, "Cock o' the North," after being shot through both legs. We are often known as the "Gay Gordons," although this is actually a corruption of the Scottish word *gey*, meaning a true or, as the French would say, *un vrai* Gordon.

The Battalion has very fine material in it. They are Scots almost to a man, and most, like my servant Graham, have seen a lot of severe fighting in Africa, Sicily, and now in Normandy. The officers appear to be a fine type, though Harry says he's not sure about one or two of the younger ones.

They have to-day changed our name from British Western European Force to British Liberation Army. When we were the B.W.E.F. the wags said it stood for "Burma when Europe finished." Now they say B.L.A. means "Burma Looms Ahead."

July 16th.

I slept in my bedding roll at the edge of the corn, a slit-trench beside me ready to roll into if there was any trouble. During the night I was woken by an artillery duel and, just before dawn, by the flak as some Huns were chased across the sky. We have spent a pleasant, idle morning, sitting here in the sun. The Jocks are gossiping, washing, reading and writing letters, mending their clothing and improving their dug-outs. Some cows have just strolled into Battalion H.Q. and eaten the corn-stooks we have been using as pillows.

This afternoon I ran over to Luc-sur-mer. A few French sat about on the beach, watching the troops bathing. All the time the dukws were bringing loads ashore: I was told they land 2,000 tons a day on that beach alone. The little town has been knocked about by shelling, but apart from wired-off enclosures marked "Mines" there was hardly a sign of four years of German occupation. There was not much for the troops to do there; only three shops are now open, two of which sell vegetables (mostly onions) and the third children's toys. The 3rd Division have taken over a hotel and turned it into an excellent rest camp where men can bath, change their underclothes, write letters, drink beer, etc. The road back was very dusty. I spoke to a Tank Corps sergeant and for a moment I really thought he was an Indian or African, so black was his skin. It is amazing what a lot of stuff we have got ashore: thousands of vehicles, and dumps of one kind or another almost every hundred yards.

There is still a lot of talk about morale. The truth is that everybody is rather ashamed of the failure of the Colombelles attack, the first reverse this Brigade has had since anybody can remember. Yet it appears that every text-book rule was broken: a night attack without any previous recce,¹ only twenty-four hours to prepare for it, and the men attacking straight out of their front-line trenches instead of from a reserve position.

One thing which particularly interested me is the way in which the men's feelings are considered in this Division. Twice

¹See Appendix I for glossary of military terms and abbreviations. The reader might be well-advised to read this straight through at this stage.

in two days I have heard, "The Jocks don't like raids. They prefer to attack with somebody on their flanks, as part of a big show." And "The Jocks don't like sitting still and just being shelled," one officer said ponderously to-day, as if this were a peculiar racial characteristic. "The Jocks fight far better if it is under somebody whom they know." And "The Jocks are accustomed to being visited by celebrities," by which were meant the Corps and Army Commander, etc. There is a good deal of annoyance because nobody from 1st Corps H.Q. ever visits us.

To-night I am going out as a spectator with two of our platoons who are to cover a R.E. working party, so as to see a bit more of the country and gain experience.

The object of this little excursion was to continue the work of gapping the minefield in front of 3rd Division. As the Huns are not meant to know that this formation is there, 1st Gordons had to provide the covering party lest the enemy obtained an identification.

After supper I jeeped down the dusty road, across the Ouistreham-Caen Canal and the Orne, and past the gliders of 6th Airborne Division which crash-landed all round there. It was just getting dark as I reached Herouville, a little village five or six miles beyond. It has been badly damaged. I hung about at the road junction while waiting for the R.E. working party. A German aircraft came over amid the usual red shower of Bofors shells. It dropped a very small bomb on the house against which the jeep in which we were sitting was parked, and we had a shower of slates and plaster on our heads. Escoville is in the front line and a village of death. No living thing stirs. All the inhabitants have moved out, and four dead cows, their bellies ballooned by the heat, lie across the main street. By moonlight it was particularly creepy. I saw the two platoons in position, ready to ambush any German patrol; then, when the sappers started work, I returned and got back here about 2 a.m.

July 17th.

This morning's news is that one of the two platoons was shot up last night; one man is wounded and three are missing.

They had a listening post 300 yards down the track consisting of a lance-corporal and three men. The N.C.O. came back with his small party and reported to the Platoon Commander that an enemy patrol was approaching. "All right," the officer said, "then go back only 150 yards." It was a fatal order. The result was that on their way back they themselves were ambushed and shot up. The three missing men are all good chaps, so we hope they will not say they were brought up from a rear position, should they be prisoners. Fortunately the C.O. told them that they were going to cover a mine-laying (and not clearing) party, so as to uphold the fiction that we are remaining on the defensive in this sector.

This afternoon I went off to try to see a friend in 6th Airborne; paying visits is called "swanning," another colloquialism. A stonk came down on Pegasus Bridge just after I had crossed it. Our gun lines in the Orne Valley have come in for a good deal of counter-battery fire.

We move forward to-morrow, part of a big push.

July 18th.

It started with the arrival overhead of hundreds of Fortresses at 05.40 this morning, and for an hour we heard bombs bursting in the distance and felt the tremor of the ground vibrating. Then our guns began to fire and kept up a steady barrage for four hours. Every now and then a German battery has replied, and a dozen shells have just landed in an empty field two hundred yards away—all right so long as they stay there. I must say I take off my hat to these German gunners firing back in the face of this overwhelming display. I paid a visit to 43 Medium Regiment, not far away. Girls were driving the cows in for milking, past the guns as they were firing; the noise seemed enough to curdle any milk. The gunners told me that 660 guns are firing 200 rounds each in this fire programme, to say nothing of twelve naval guns of the Fleet.

I gather that the grand strategy behind this operation is for the tanks to break through on the left of the line, through the gaps in the minefield recently made by the sappers. The armour will be followed up by 3rd British and 51st Highland Division.

But we have been given only a limited objective, for this thrust is no more than a feint to draw off the German armour in order to enable the Americans on the right of the line to drive south and west along the coast as far as they can manage to go.

We move off some time to-night. Meanwhile there is nothing for us to do but lie about in the sun among the oats, hay, flax and potatoes of our fields. It is certainly an odd sight: 700 men scattered over the ground in little groups without a building anywhere near.

I am going to be very happy in this little Battalion H.Q. community. The C.O., or Harry as he has asked me to call him, is a dear. The other members are Alec Lumsden, the Adjutant, a member of the Stock Exchange; Ewen Traill, our Padre; "Bert" Brown, the doctor; and David Martin, Intelligence Officer. David is a tremendously hard worker and also a very lovable character. He comes from Dundee, is an only child and had just left school when the war broke out. Ewen is a great character: a Church of Scotland minister in Glasgow who resigned in 1939 and in due course obtained a combatant commission, in which capacity he was posted to us. He is young, high-spirited and argumentative, and a Labour Parliamentary candidate, though more from force of circumstances than conviction, I suspect. He is a brave chap and goes into battle with the stretcher-bearers instead of staying at the R.A.P., as many padres do. Bert Brown is a solid, sturdy chap but with a grand sense of humour, the sort of man of whom you could make a friend for life. His pre-war practice is in Galashiels.

What a lot I would give to be able to see through the months ahead and know what fate has in store for each one of us!¹

At 6 p.m. I left for Ranville with a recce party consisting of one officer from each company, to act as guides for the Battalion when it arrives to-night.

We were routed across the Orne at Ouistreham, captured by 4 Commando on D-Day. Several times we had to pull in to the

¹To anticipate somewhat: of these six of us in Battalion H.Q. in July, 1944—Cumming-Bruce, Lindsay, Lumsden, Martin, Traill and Brown—three got through unscathed, one was wounded, one killed and one died of wounds. The four who survived the campaign were between them awarded three D.S.O.s and two M.C.s.

side to make way for returning ambulances. At one of these halts I spoke to the Quartermaster of a K.S.L.I. battalion, whose driver was mending a puncture. They have had 170 casualties to-day, he said. I wondered how 152 Brigade are getting on—152 Brigade is in the lead.

Ranville is a nice little village, or rather it was. The Chateau was the first H.Q. of 3rd Parachute Brigade, who landed all round it. A parachute still hangs in the branches of a big elm, and I wonder if the luckless owner was shot like a sitting bird as he swung there, or whether he managed to get down safely. In front of the Chateau was a P.O.W. cage containing over a thousand. They look a very scratch lot, but I suppose prisoners are always dirty and dejected.

While waiting for the Battalion, I bought two bottles of cider at six francs apiece from a very old lady who had been living alone for five years, all her relations being in Paris. I found her almost in tears because her best milking cow has been killed on a mine. She apologised for the cider. It was very poor stuff, she said, because some shell splinters have pierced the vat. How often and in what very different circumstances have I had cause to bless those months that I so unwillingly spent so long ago in a French family: in 1929, talking to officials, missionaries and my negro servants in the Belgian Congo. In 1932, at an eve-of-the-battle party given by Victor Sassoon, from which we went straight off to change into uniform and man the Shanghai defences, and at which (I had almost forgotten) my partner at dinner was Countess Ciano, then the wife of only an obscure Vice-Consul. In 1934, to talk to a Rumanian geologist with a Spanish wife on the coast of Greenland. In 1935, to lecture in Paris and Brussels. In 1940, to liase with the Chasseurs Alpains in Norway. In 1942, to command a Polish detachment. And now, in 1944, to comfort a little old widow about her dead cow!

July 19th.

There was plenty of excitement last night before the Battalion got in.

At 11 p.m., just as I was going to meet them, we had an air-raid. They came over low and lit up the whole countryside with

dazzling clusters of parachute flares. Our A.A. was pretty ineffective and we had no night fighters up. They dropped five bombs very close to this farmhouse and two officers in my small advance party were hit. I am afraid that Gilchrist's wound is a spinal one, but the other fellow is all right. We lay on the floor of the dining-room for the first one or two, then ran outside to a dug-out.

When all was quiet again I went to look for the Battalion, but missed them as they had been sent another way owing to the road being blocked by burning transport. Some artillery ammunition trucks had been hit and set on fire and the shells kept exploding. I had a nightmare ride on the back of a motor-bike, and was upset and annoyed to find that neither I nor the driver had a field-dressing when some gunners at the roadside stopped us and asked for some. Eventually, tired, cross and sweating, I found the Battalion, and the guides led the companies and transport off into the areas we had chosen. Then a young and rather shaken officer of the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry arrived to ask for assistance. Their A Echelon had caught it badly in the bombing and three officers had been killed. It was too dark to assess how many men were killed, wounded or missing. None of them had dug slit-trenches. Incredible—and in the fifth year of the war! One would say it served them right were it not such a tragedy.

All through the night the fires burned and shells kept exploding.

Were it not for the dive-bombing of mosquitoes this farm would be very comfortable. The absentee owners have moved their treasures into a few back rooms, but have left out all the useful furniture. I had a good sleep in pyjamas from 5 a.m. till 11, then went out for a stroll. In the yard a rabbit was eating a shirt, so I told some men to feed the animals. There are five bomb holes within a hundred yards, one of which is only six feet from the house. I went round the company areas. A are sharing some farm buildings with a party of Welsh Guardsmen, B are dug in alongside a wall, C are in the garden and cellars of a completely gutted house. The Jocks are all in excellent spirits.

I got back in time for the one o'clock news. The Russians

are within thirty kilometres of East Prussia, and Stalin says he won't be responsible for the consequences. Ewen has gone off to help the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry bury their dead. The subaltern who made such a sad mess of things near Escoville has departed—with "athlete's foot."

It is difficult to find out what is happening in the battle. I gather that several villages are holding us up, each with a few tanks in them which are costly to dislodge. One has to hand it to the German for being a tough fighter.

We are nine officers and 200 men under strength, and it is time that something was done about this.

July 20th.

We are still in Ranville and there is no special news as to when we are to move forward. There has been sporadic shelling of the area. Nothing very much, but the Brigade Signal Officer was killed last night. What a lot of people must have been killed in this war by these odd shells which suddenly and unexpectedly and for no apparent reason arrive, like Flash Kellet who was sitting outside his tank, shaving. A few landed near the mobile shower baths to-day and there was a scurry of men, stark naked except for their steel helmets, to the nearest cover.

The Canadians captured Colombelles yesterday, and I have just come back from viewing the scene of our abortive attack of July 13th. I can't think how anybody could have expected a battalion to take such a strong position with no great fire support. All the houses were fortified and the ground is honeycombed with German diggings. Although nine artillery regiments were made available, Corps said this was not necessary and the programme was drastically cut down. David Martin pointed all the features out to me, so it was very interesting walking round the battlefield, though we did not feel very comfortable owing to the possibility of mines and booby-traps. David told me that two brigadiers were blown up walking the course after an action in Sicily. I saw a dead Canadian in his shirt sleeves just beyond a wire fence and thought that I should collect his identity disc, then realised he could only have been killed by a mine. I wondered for what private purpose he had wandered off there on his own.

Further on I saw an arm in a khaki shirt sticking out from under a groundsheet, but on investigating found it was a dead German. The ground was very heavily pitted with craters, for the Canadians attacked after the Fortresses had bombed it. We came to an abandoned German anti-tank gun and could see from the marks on the ground that the crew had come out of their dug-out (with several bomb holes very close to it) and turned the gun round more to the right and then fired fifteen rounds—brave chaps. Returning, we met a Seaforth subaltern who told us he was looking for the place where his brother was killed.

Harry was also touring the battlefield and I was quite relieved when he got back safely. Shortly afterwards, a very chastened party, consisting of Ewen, Alec Lumsden and one other, came in to say that they had blown up their jeep on a mine and that Robertson, a subaltern, will lose his foot and several fingers. They were following a truck when somebody said, "This can't be right. And look at that brewed-up carrier. I bet it was a mine." So they began to turn and, immediately, up she went. The tragedy is that Robertson might not have been badly hurt had he sandbags on the floor of his jeep; they were taken out this morning for the car to be cleaned, and were not replaced.

Six deserters from 3rd Division surrendered to us to-day. The death penalty for desertion was abolished in 1929. This is quite right in the cases of men who genuinely lose their nerve, but I would have shot the thirty-odd toughs from M.E.F. who came back with me from Durban in 1942. They were all serving sentences of penal servitude for desertion, rape, arson and similar serious crimes, and then proceeded to beat up their guards and burn part of the ship.

We had a good dinner to-night: rabbit and some excellent white wine. Somebody has obtained a four-gallon container of this from a drunken Canadian in exchange for a Gordon cap-badge which the Quartermaster will replace. "Scrappy" Hay, who commands 5-7th Gordons in this Brigade, came in afterwards. He said that his view of foraging is that he just doesn't enquire what happens to rabbits and hens in unoccupied farms. There is a story of a dialogue between a staff officer and a Gordon who was plucking a fowl, as follows:

S.O., "You know you will be shot if anybody sees you with that hen?"

Gordon, "Well, Sir, we mae git shot ony time so it maks nae difference."

S.O. (disgusted), "I suppose you are one of those desert fellows."

Harry says that his ambition is to loot Goering's house at Karenhalle, as his family have done the two biggest pieces of looting in history, his great-great-grandfather, Elgin, the marbles named after him, and his great-grandfather, ably assisted by his grandfather, the Pekin Summer Palace.

July 21st.

Harry found a black kitten asleep on his bed last night, a good omen for the day his promotion came through, so she has been named Jean after the legendary Duchess of Gordon and taken on the strength.

The tanks are still passing through: 11th and 7th Armoured Divisions, displaying their heraldic rodents. It is still as hard as ever to know how the battle is going.

We heard to-night that "Scrappy" Hay has been wounded in the head by shellfire while crossing Pegasus Bridge, poor chap. It is wonderful that we have been able to mount this offensive with so much armour across only two bridges. It shows that we have artillery as well as air superiority. The gunners' appreciation is that the enemy's ammunition is strictly limited and that they are using every kind of gun, including some captured in Russia.

Word has just come that Robertson died of his wounds during the night.

Also that we take over in the line to-morrow.

July 22nd.

The Brigadier came over after breakfast and told me to take command of 5-7th Gordons in place of Scrappy, until somebody who is on the way arrives. They are a T.A. Battalion which has always done well in action. He told me that I would have to accept Scrappy's dispositions, which he and the other company

commanders reced yesterday, and that I had better get down right away, contact the units on the flank, and meet the battalion when it arrived in the afternoon.

I had only about ten miles to go but it took a long time. First there was a traffic block in Demouville, and then we got bogged in deep mud on a tank track until a Welsh Guards R.S.M. in a carrier towed us through. We passed 1st Gordons recce group lunching at the roadside and Harry was feeding Jean. We went on until I came to some unmistakable guardsmen.

"Are you the 1st Grenadiers?" I shouted, and then there was a sudden swish and some cracks close by. I dived into the nearest hole and landed on the ankles of a subaltern. For the next ten minutes we sat facing one another with our feet tucked under each other's armpits, while mortar bombs landed in the orchard all round. He told me that it was a bloody place. Cagny just in front, and Guillerville a mile off to the left, both get shelled a great deal. So they were not sorry we were going to take over from them.

As soon as things were quiet I made my way over to the battalion command post. I walked fast, one ear cocked for the next lot of stuff coming over, and passing as close as I decently could to any slit-trenches on the way. The Grenadier C.O. also said that it was a bloody area. From his trench I could see our position away to the left, and as I looked through my glasses a salvo of shells landed right in the middle of it. The Grenadiers were to the left of and slightly behind the Irish Guards, and 5th Black Watch and 7th Argylls took over this evening from these two battalions. On their left was a gap of a mile until one came to the Warwicks in Guillerville and the K.S.L.I., the two right-hand battalions of 3rd Division. It was this gap that 5-7th Gordons had to fill.

From the Grenadiers I went on to the Irish. They, too, said that it was a bloody place; there seemed to be complete unanimity on this point! What I particularly wanted to know was whether my area was under enemy observation, in which case I had to hurry back and stop the battalion coming in till after dark. They thought not, and this I was inclined to confirm when I walked round the ground, which consisted of several very large fields.

with some thick hedges and trees, in a slight dip. I had the company areas marked on my map and didn't much like them. Thirteen hundred yards is too wide a front for a battalion to hold, according to my ideas, for if you are likely to be counter-attacked you must sit tight in a small hard-hitting knob, with one company able to shoot across the front of another. Five hundred men fairly close to each other will always fight better than five separate and more or less isolated packets each of a hundred, who can be defeated in detail. So I resolved to make some changes.

The Battalion came in sight: a few carriers, followed by a column of marching men, a thousand yards away. Then there was the usual hum, quickly becoming louder, and down came twenty-four shells half-way between us, which greatly increased my anxiety lest we should get many casualties before we were dug in. This stonk was followed by heavy concentrations on Guillerville, Cagny and the road leading into it. However, the Battalion arrived safely and lost no time in getting below ground.

I have felt rather jumpy all day and wonder if it is the result of smoking too much.

July 23rd.

Last night we were told to send out a recce patrol. I sent a young Canadian officer, Glass, with a corporal and a private. My orders were that they should return through the K.S.L.I. on the left, whom we took good care to inform. The K.S.L.I. warned one of their companies, but the patrol strayed rather too far to the left, came in on the front of another and were shot up. Corporal Bruce was killed and the other man wounded.

This morning I was up at 4 a.m. and round the battalion at "stand-to." At 5.30 the Brigadier arrived (to judge my form?) and walked round two companies with me. In a deserted Hun dug-out there is an opened bottle of Sauterne and, after tasting it rather tentatively, we both took a good swig at it. It has gone sour but the bitter taste is oddly clean and refreshing.

A very heavy concentration, at least a hundred heavy-calibre shells, has just come down on the Warwicks in Guillerville. I am now quite confident that we are not under observation, and as

the whole battalion is in open fields and away from features that would be marked on German maps, we should not get much shelling. My H.Q. is in the middle of some standing corn. After breakfast, just as I was going to turn in for some sleep, another patrol was ordered for to-night. I hate sending out these patrols and wonder if it is really essential. Does the higher command, before ordering one, carefully consider whether the information which may be obtained is worth risking the life of a good young officer or N.C.O.?

Then I was ordered to go to Brigade. There we had a conference with the Welsh Guards squadron-commander whose tanks are to support us if we are counter-attacked, and with the gunners, since smoke would be required to get the tanks into position. This precautionary plot was caused by information from a German officer who lost his way and jumped into a Black Watch dug-out when shelling started, to be taken prisoner by the somewhat startled private on whose legs he landed.

"We have just come down here for an attack," he said, "and I can't understand why it has not begun already."

On the way back to the Battalion I heard Moaning Minnie for the first time. This is a multiple-barrel mortar in battery, fired electrically. It makes an extraordinary groaning and moaning noise which one can always hear quite plainly. The groans and moans start low in the scale and rise to a higher-pitched note. Then there is silence till one hears the hum as the projectiles arrive, followed by a ghastly drumming as some twenty or thirty of them explode one after another. The blast is considerable but the fragmentation poor, so though they cause complete devastation where they land the effect is only local. The actual destruction is less than would be caused by the same weight of shells, but the noise, and therefore moral effect, is much greater. I certainly felt more frightened than usual as I jeeped along the dusty track and heard it coming towards me, then banging down on the cross-road in front.

July 24th.

We had another air-raid last night, about 11 p.m. The parachute flares and A.A. red tracer are a most beautiful sight, and

one feels pretty safe peering out at it from inside one's slit-trench. I imagine the enemy were looking for a transport concentration. Later we had a visit from Moaning Minnie but most of it landed short. I had just got to sleep again when the duty officer woke me up to say that the patrol was back. The officer in command told me that they were stopped 500 yards out by hearing voices. He didn't try to get round to one side, so it was rather a wet performance.

I went round the battalion between five and seven and returned to find that the doctor, Thom, was killed last night by the Minnie stonk. He was rather a lone wolf and always slept away from other people, and one landed right inside his dug-out. Nobody knew about it until his servant came to call him this morning. He had been with the battalion since the night before El Alamein and was immensely popular. We buried him this afternoon at the edge of the corn, with ten representatives from each company, and the Pipe-Major playing: "Flowers of the Forest," the customary burial lament. I breathed a sigh of relief when it was safely over, for sixty or seventy men bunched together was asking for trouble.

Afterwards there was another heavy stonk on our left, and Mike du Boulay, the second in command, said gloomily that this is what we shall get in the woods, where we are likely to go in a few days' time. Everybody feels that being relegated to the woods to hold part of the line is a fearful disgrace, especially since 49th Division are to take over from us and continue our advance to the south. The truth of the matter is that the famous Highland Division has a rather indifferent reputation at the moment, as a result of which certain changes have been made. One of our brigadiers unburdened himself to me yesterday when I met him on the road to Brigade H.Q. He says that we have now become almost a L. of C. formation, and are very low in the priority list for reinforcements and equipment.

So no wonder officers walk about with long faces at the moment.

July 25th.

This morning there was two hours' artillery preparation for the Canadian attack, followed by a Typhoon strafe. In spite of this the Germans fought hard and we heard a lot of small-arms fire, and once a Canadian officer on the R/T saying that he was held up by mortar fire coming from the far end of a village.

A couple of enemy aircraft came over yesterday evening and lots of A.A. guns opened up and fired about a mile behind them—no wonder they cannot hit the doodle-bugs. This was followed by a heavy artillery barrage on the front of the Canadians to the right of us, to soften up for their advance to-day. In the middle of it about ten formations, each of six Fortresses, flew over and bombed a wood about two miles away—presumably an enemy tank concentration. A lot of flak went up and I felt great admiration for the crews. Fortunately the German A.A. gunners seem to be just as bad as our own.

We had the usual air-raid just after dark but most of the bombs fell in no-man's-land or on the enemy forward positions. About midnight the duty officer-woke me to say that a squadron of enemy tanks were reported two miles from our front and advancing towards us. Tanks are very blind at night so I had no anxieties for the moment, and thought that perhaps they were getting into position to support a dawn attack. I checked up once again on our mortar and artillery S.O.S. tasks and told the duty officer to wake me and all company commanders at 3.40 a.m. with a view to special alertness from 4 a.m., fifteen minutes before the normal time for "stand-to." Then I turned in again.

Every time you get out of your dug-out it gets full of mosquitoes, and once more I had to go through the drill of burning them up with a torch of paper; then, after singeing my eyebrows and almost setting my bedding alight, I closed the trap-door and went round again with a torch, swatting a few hardy survivors. This done, I got into my bedding roll and smothered my hands and face with mosquito cream (Alec Lumsden says that the proper use of this cream is to open the pot and put it near, when it will attract all the mosquitoes away from you).

No sooner was this elaborate ritual complete than the duty officer popped his head in to say that there were a lot of flares

coming up from the enemy lines, so out I had to go again. And so there were, for the Hun was feeling jittery, but I couldn't shell where the lights were coming up from because our patrol was still out in front. Later the patrol commander came in to say that they had been caught in the bombing and one of the men with him had been hit in the head and stretcher-bearers were required. To-day the doctor says he will not live.

July 26th.

As soon as the squadron of East Riding Yeomanry and a company of Tyneside Scottish arrived we began to withdraw, the M.T. on one route and the companies marching back independently by another. I kept the new doctor and his ambulance till the last lot were well clear and then we went back together. We reached Ranville about twelve.

Soon after lunch we got heavily stonked. Thirty or forty shells landed in a very small compass and we had nine casualties, including Dowson, second in command of D Company and a fine chap, badly wounded in the stomach. Luckily there is an Advanced Dressing Station within fifty yards of where Dowson was hit, and they had him on the operating table in no time, which may well have saved his life.

I am sending four officers off on forty-eight hours' leave to Bayeux, including Ian Glennie, a magnificent young company commander who had a narrow escape two days ago when a shell splinter smashed his pocket-watch.¹

Harry also had a narrow escape to-day when a shell landed very close to him. I hear that the Camerons have lost three C.O.s in a week.

July 27th.

I inspected three rifle companies to-day for cleanliness and serviceability of equipment; two were good and one bad. I talked to all the men I could. About ten per cent are from England,

¹ Major Glennie was wounded by mortar fire on August 15th. Although bleeding from five or six different wounds, he refused to be sent back in a jeep, saying that others were in greater need. While walking back he collapsed from loss of blood. He has never been decorated.

mostly Yorkshire and Lancashire, who replaced the original Donside and Deeside casualties.

This evening we had Retreat, with "The Road to the Isles," "The Skye Boat Song," and all my favourite tunes. It was a brave display, the pipe band marching and counter-marching in a tiny paddock beside the main road, with ammunition trucks and ambulances slowing down to see what they could while passing. Most of the time the guns in the field beyond were firing over our heads. The officers of the battalion, in their kilts, stood on the mounds of earth excavated from trenches, and the men sat around in their shirt sleeves. The only person who wasn't happy was myself because of the risk of a lot of casualties from the one odd shell.

For supper we had an excellent sirloin of a cow killed in yesterday's shelling, and a guest in the person of Maurice Burnett, who commands 127 Field Regt. R.A., which has supported this Brigade since the start of the desert campaign. He was saying what a bad show it was that Shimi Lovat and Hugh Kindersley were badly wounded on D plus three by one troop of our own artillery firing short, and how difficult it is to find out who is responsible when this happens as everybody checks and covers up on receiving the signal "Report elevation fired." It is the one unforgiveable sin, but one must be philosophical when it happens and forgive the occasional human error as the benefit one receives from the guns is so immense. Colonel Burnett says that our superiority of artillery is about forty to one, and that most of the German guns are immobile as the enemy has only one tractor to about four guns, and a great shortage of petrol. If this is so, it is the R.A.F. we have to thank for it.

The new Divisional Commander has arrived: Major-General Thomas Rennie. He is a Black Watch who escaped in 1940 when the Division had to capitulate at St. Valery, and subsequently commanded a battalion and then a brigade of the reformed Highland Division in North Africa. He was wounded commanding 3rd Division soon after D-Day. Everybody is delighted with the appointment.

July 28th.

We were strafed a bit last night—a few bombs and then about a dozen shells, one of which by bad luck landed in the dug-out of a subaltern called Seth, and of course he was blown to bits.

The woods are off—thank goodness—and to-day I recced a rest area: just the usual open fields: A Company in the mustard, B in the wheat, C in the roots, sort of thing. Not a building in the whole area, but it will be all right if the weather holds as it is further back and everybody will be able to relax, instead of wondering if they are going to be shelled any minute, which is so tiring.

I wish it were possible to arrange more recreation for the men. At present the only pleasure resort is "Nobby's Bar," where they can buy chocolate, soap, tooth-paste, etc., nothing very exciting. I have been sending parties off to the seaside, but there is nothing for them to do there except bathe, and also trying unsuccessfully to buy some cider so as to get a reading-room and canteen open. I am sure all the rear H.Q.s and people far from the battlefield have plenty of mobile cinemas, concert parties, etc.

July 29th.

We moved back to-day, over our old friend Pegasus Bridge and through the lines of our gunners (who have had quite a number of casualties as some twenty to thirty shells have landed in their area every day for a month). As we marched westwards the old familiar landmarks came in sight once again: the outline of the coast, the twin church spires of La Deliverande, the landing strip at Plumetôt, and so on. It should be pleasant here if only the blower the doctor boasts about will kill some of these corn mites.

This afternoon I visited Caen, still in search of cider, and found a friend in Colonel Usher, a Gordon Highlander who is in charge of Civil Affairs there, and who promised to provide some. There is awful desolation from our bombing. Usher said there were 1,000 killed and 2,000 wounded, and 600 bodies are

still buried under the debris; there is certainly an unhealthy stench there.

Inevitably the devastating bombing of Caen, confined as it was to the northern part of the city, will have caused a great deal of French ill-feeling, and one wonders whether and to what extent the local people were given warning. It certainly stopped the enemy from defending the town and moving reinforcements and supplies through it, and no doubt the decision was made at the highest level and only after most careful thought of the considerations involved. Fortunately the Cathedral is only slightly damaged—far less than St. Paul's—and we made a pilgrimage to the tomb of William the Conqueror, 1066-1087. Caen is still under shellfire so the shops and restaurants are closed and all activities have come to a full stop.

I wish I knew what is in the wind. It is only certain that we have not been brought back here to rest for no purpose.

July 30th.

This evening the new General gave a talk to all his commanders. It was in a small room in a chateau and there were only about twenty-five of us there. Nevertheless, sitting at the back, I could only hear part of what he said as a charging engine was chug-chugging away in the courtyard outside. Points the Divisional Commander made were: (1) Enemy tanks may well break through on a narrow front and get behind us. If this happens nobody must be alarmed, and they can be hunted down by infantry at night. (2) Everything within a battalion depends upon confidence in the C.O. (3) Attacks should be made on as wide a front as possible in order to disperse the enemy's defensive fire. (4) The high prestige of the Highland Division is useful as it makes the enemy less inclined to take liberties with us. (5) Americans don't tie up arrangements as well as we do, but they have more dash.

Whatever troubles the Division had in the first part of this campaign, I have little doubt that they will now disappear. The well-being of every organisation, whether it be a factory, a

political party or a military formation, depends upon the personal qualities of the one individual at the head of it. And no man could fail to have faith in Thomas Rennie, or in his subordinate commanders for that matter.

The strength of the Highland Division lies firstly in the regular Highland officers, "from the oldest families in Scotland," as Ian Morrison wrote of the Argylls in Malaya. Coming from a Lowland regiment myself, I cannot be accused of prejudice in holding the opinion that the pre-war Highland officers were on the whole the pick of the Army. This is due to the fact that each of these regiments always had the choice of a very large number of candidates for commissions. In spite of the losses of five years of war, ninety per cent of the infantry commanders and principal staff officers of the Division come from these regular soldiers who went from Sandhurst into the Black Watch, Seaforths, Gordons, Camerons and Argylls.

The second source of strength is the fine type of pre-war Territorial officers who command most of the companies and batteries in the Division to-day. The quality of the company commanders is of immense importance as nearly every operation is nowadays a succession of company battles. Normally the battalion commander fights with one, or at the most two companies at a time, while the rest are firm.

The third source of strength is, of course, the magnificent type of man that you get from Scotland, whether he comes from the glens or the straths, the fields or the coal-face, the towns or the cities.

This evening we went to see "The Lodger," but it was not much fun. The marquee was not dark enough for a successful film show and the seats consisted of compo boxes. Even the unaccustomed smell of powder and scent that wafted back from a row of Canadian sisters in front did not adequately compensate for my numb bum.

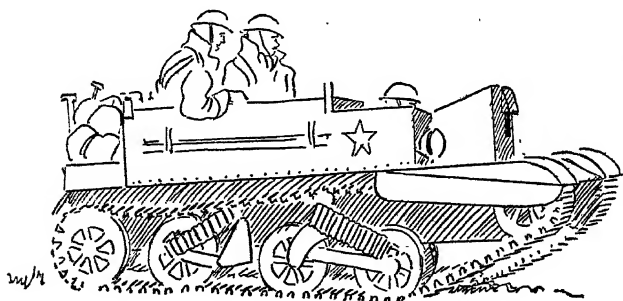
July 31st.

The new C.O., Blair-Imrie, has arrived. He is five years younger than me but has had five times more battle experience,

having fought through the desert campaign and out here since D-Day.

After lunch I returned to 1st Gordons at Anguerny, and was delighted to be once more with Harry and Co. Some of them were off to Bayeux and I went with them. Never have I seen a place so crowded with troops. It is far worse than Salisbury on a Saturday night, and the cathedral not so fine. Hot and dusty, we went to the Lion D'Or for a wash. It has been taken over by the Press, but we found that even they are living in some squalor and discomfort. When I saw "Information" I thought that a charming French girl would tell me what was what, but the bureau is staffed by a military policeman. "The only place to eat in is the N.A.A.F.I.," he said. However, I found a small restaurant and shared a table with two young reinforcement officers who arrived from England this afternoon. They were very curious to know what war is like and I fear I shot a bit of a line.

We drove back in an open jeep, racing the gathering darkness. At Fontaine-Henry we passed a castle straight out of Grimm's fairy tales, and it was something of an anti-climax to read a large notice outside which said that it is now a dental centre.



Carrier

August 1st.

BIG NEWS to-day. The Highland Division is to be the spearhead of the coming break-through south-east of Caen.

I spent the first part of the morning inspecting M.T., after which I attended one of Harry's twenty-minute talks to each company, a tactical discussion, and at 1.30 p.m. a talk by the Brigadier. Then after a hurried lunch, I drafted some notes on battle discipline for Harry and went out to help judge the Regimental Games, as sports in a Scottish unit are always called. C Company won, and its commander, the handsome and charming Bruce Rae, looked the very personification of a Highland officer as he stepped forward to get his prize. The games were followed by Retreat, from which we all went to Brigade H.Q. for a drink. After supper I helped Harry write some citations for awards. A few more days like this and I shall be glad to get into battle for a rest.

August 2nd.

We fired Piats again this morning and had another man hit by the tail of the bomb flying back. We lost a good officer in Keithley in the same way yesterday, and both were lucky not to have lost an eye.

This afternoon the Canadian Scottish played us at football, after which the two pipe bands combined for Retreat.

We have had to give the 5-7th our second Mortar Officer and have taken Glass, the young Canadian officer, in his place.

The Americans are getting on well. They are in Rennes and St. Malo already.

Still no news as to when our party starts.

August 3rd.

These Piat bombs are really the limit. The C.S.M. of H.Q. Company was also hit in the face this morning. I gave him morphia from the little capsule which I always carry inside my field dressing.

Anguerny is a nice little village, or rather cluster of farms

with a school and one shop. The weather has been heavenly, which is just as well as nearly all the troops are sleeping out in slit-trenches. To-day we had a visit from the A.P.M. of Corps, who asked if we didn't know that it is forbidden to use crops for camouflage purposes and lining the bottom of dug-outs (for warmth). The Adjutant tartly replied that he was our first visitor of any kind from Corps H.Q. They still seem to think that we are out on an exercise.

A steady stream of British aircraft flying over and returning this evening. I wonder where they have been.

August 4th.

A little information has filtered down about the future. The other two Brigades are battling first, after which we are to attack a wooded feature. But by that time things may well be very different, so we are liable to be called upon to do anything.

In company with several thousand others I had a bathe in the sea this afternoon. As far as I could see, total war or not, they all had a bathing dress on except two, of which I was one. On the way back I took David Martin to the dentist and so caught a glimpse of the two tented General Hospitals, 80 and 88. The nurses are very sensibly dressed in khaki silk shirts, drill trousers and bandeaux round their heads. There is an airfield next door, and many of the wounded reach England on the same day that they have been hit. We got back in time to see the end of the inter-company football final. While watching it we heard a mine explode not far away and wondered what unlucky chap had caught it.

August 5th.

Things (I'm not quite sure what things) are going so well that some of the timings have been advanced, which means that we move to-morrow.

The confidence we all feel in the future is wonderful. It is the product of faith in the generalship, in our own Division and in Second Army. The battle of El Alamein marked a turning-point in the fortunes of the British Army, a landmark in its history which, with the present campaign, will always be

associated with the name of General Montgomery. Since El Alamein the Army has never doubted that each operation would end successfully.

August 6th.

I spent most of the morning studying the air-photos, and maps over-printed with all the enemy dispositions on them as interpreted from the air-photos by experts—what a lot we owe to the R.A.F. for these! Harry spoke to all officers about the coming operation. 154 Brigade move first, in two columns of Priests and tanks. The Priests are S.P.s with the guns removed so that about a dozen infantry can ride in each, protected from mortar and shell splinters. They look like tanks but with the whole top open. Their job is to make the initial break-through, by night made brighter by several searchlights, which the troops call "Monty's Moonlight." 152 go next, then us, and finally the armour.

Bert, our doctor, is confident that we shall be in Paris in ten days. Certainly the Hun has failed to contain us in our little peninsula and the front he now has to try to hold is already doubled in length.

August 7th.

Last night we moved down to Grentheville, starting at 9.30 p.m. The men were in troop-carriers, which were followed by our own column of transport. It was pitch dark going through Caen and the dust made it worse. Except for a few traffic-control policemen, the streets were empty, and it was very hard to follow the little green lamps which marked our route. I thought what a mess up there would be if somebody took a wrong turning as everybody behind would follow. A mile short of the village we got out and walked, so as not to risk a lot of men being hit in a troop-carrier if the enemy shelled the village just as we were coming in. Battalion H.Q. is in a small, old farmhouse, tucked in among buildings and dark alley-ways. It is much too close to the cross-roads for my liking, though the ramifications of walls and buildings give some protection.

We took over from a Canadian battalion and they told us

what they could of the form here. Most of the shelling was directed at a lone chateau three hundred yards away, they said, so this we decided to leave severely alone. I did a turn of duty officer from 3 a.m. till 5 a.m. and then went round with Harry at "stand to." Many of D Company had no equipment on, and A and C's trenches few good fire positions. B had no latrines and two platoons no proper field of fire and no sentries. Harry is too kind. On the other hand, everybody loves him so much that they try desperately hard whenever any test comes, so he produces good results just the same.

We were sharply shelled several times this morning, then David Martin, the I.O., spotted that this always happened when a car raised a cloud of dust coming into Grentheville; so he posted a sentry to tell them to take it more slowly, and it's been quiet ever since. But we are expecting a lot of enemy gunfire about 11 p.m. to-night, when the bombing of La Hogue and Secqueville-la-Campagne takes place, so we are moving Battalion H.Q. three hundred yards back from the cross-roads. Our artillery superiority has altered the whole conduct of the war; without it we should not be able to sit in these few obvious villages like we do.

I have had my bedding roll put in a Hun air-raid shelter and hope to get a better sleep than the flies in the stable allowed me this morning. The Brigadier goes to Division for orders at 6 a.m. to-morrow, and Harry to Brigade for his at 8 a.m. It will no doubt be an eventful day.

August 8th.

Well, the bombing started at 23.00 hours and our barrage at 23.45 last night. We moved our H.Q. because of the stuff we anticipated coming back, but it never happened except that ten minutes before the flag fell there was a little harassing fire. Two or three shells landed in the village, killing one man and wounding two others. The bombing lasted an hour, and as the targets were only three miles from us we heard it pretty plainly, though the cotton-wool we had been given for our ears was unnecessary. Nor did any of it land amongst us.

The day started with the news that the other two Brigades

had got all their objectives except a village called Tilly-la-Campagne, which was still holding out. We left Grentheville in twenty-seven Priests, with everybody protected by armour except one or two jeep drivers at the back.

Our route took us through the Polish Armoured Division, and there we stopped for a time, in the middle of an open plain. Then Harry came up and told me that we were to attack Secqueville-la-Campagne at 4 p.m., that he was going to recce a start line behind Garcelles, which the Camerons had just captured, and that I was to bring forward the Battalion. So I drove off in a Priest with the company commanders to look for a place where we could debus and feed. We had a jolting journey across country, six or eight of us all standing with our elbows on the edge of the armoured cupuloa. We crossed another huge plain and saw mines and brewed-up tanks and carriers at the side of the track. In front was Rocquancourt, and we could see shells crumping down on it; we chose some cornfields, not too close to it, for companies to disperse. On the way back a monster shell exploded only fifty yards from us, but nothing rattled against our tin hide; they say that the bigger the shell the poorer the fragmentation, and perhaps that is so. I am always nervous and unhappy when troops are bunched, as when they are getting out of trucks and forming up to move off. However, in spite of my anxiety, which was aggravated by periodical shelling of the area, they all got dispersed safely by about 1 p.m. and began to dig in. There had been a muddle over the H.Q. officers' food so I felt very hungry, but a Canadian officer insisted on giving me a bar of chocolate.

Then a message from Harry: O Group just short of Garcelles two miles away at 2.30 and the battalion to be there by 3.30. So at two I sent the company commanders and specialist officers off in two jeeps to get their orders, and soon after began to follow at the head of the marching battalion.

I led off out of the cornfield and on to the tarmacadam with my servant, Graham, and two signallers carrying an 18-set in contact with the companies, the leading one of which was at my heels. Down the main road we went. It was raised on an embankment and there were no trees or hedges on either side.

The road and verges were much pitted by shell craters and I felt very naked. As soon as I could, I turned off left and across a field, five hundred fighting men, well dispersed, following behind me. Then I heard the awful groaning of Moaning Minnie and looked round to hear the crack and see the burst as some twenty smackers landed just about where we had left the main road. But, as luck would have it, they came down between two companies. The Camerons' carrier platoon, digging in just there, had some casualties.

We crossed the stubble and entered a leafy lane, and there in the middle of it I found the General: a tall, rather heavy figure wearing a tam o' shanter with the red hackle of the Black Watch. He pointed out some ground where I could get the battalion dispersed and which had not hitherto been shelled.

The General was looking very glum. "I'm afraid there will not be much artillery to support this attack," he said. "The Americans have bombed our gun lines near Caen and Colombelles with forty-eight Fortresses."

I walked up the lane and found Harry giving out his orders in an empty garage beside a ruined farmhouse. I found a corner and sat down in it. The orders were of necessity somewhat complicated. The company commanders asked for H hour to be put back till 5 p.m., and even then they were late.

My job was to bring up the mortars and anti-tank guns when Harry called for them, but he soon got out of wireless touch. I walked down into Garcelles to try to read the battle. There seemed to be a good deal of shelling coming both ways and I couldn't tell what was happening. So I nipped back, got a carrier and ran up to see Harry. I found him with his Tac H.Q. at a hedge junction just short of Secqueville. The earth all around was scorched, burnt out by our flame-throwers. He told me that all the companies were on their objectives except one and that I could send up the anti-tank guns, but that the most important thing was to see to the evacuation of our wounded who were now going back in jeeps, some sitting up, some lying on stretchers.

Back in Garcelles I found the R.A.P. in a mill: a solid round tower standing alone in the middle of the village square. About

twenty wounded were lying in the straw. The doctor, Bert Brown, the Padre, Ewen Traill, and the medical sergeant were working away quietly and efficiently, while two orderlies carried the stretchers in and out and gave cigarettes and cups of strong sweet tea to those who were awaiting attention. As I waited for a word with the doctor, who was putting a sergeant's leg into a Thomas's splint while an orderly gave him a sniff of chloroform, Ewen called me over. Mitchell, a subaltern, terribly shattered by a Minnie shell, had just been brought in with one arm and one leg half severed. But such must have been the shock that he felt no pain. The morphia, which a chinagraph scribble on his forehead recorded, had not yet begun to take effect, and he chatted away as brave as could be. His leg had begun to bleed badly, one of the dressings having slipped, and Ewen bade me press a pad on it till more expert attention was available. Then, to my astonishment, he opened his jack-knife and quickly cut through the inch or two of sinew and flesh by which the arm was hanging. Mitchell felt nothing.

Bert said he was short of ambulances, and could I do something about it quickly? He whispered that some of the badly wounded would not live unless they could be got back speedily to where they could be operated upon. Nothing loath, for I wished to see no more surgery, I went outside and across to the Camerons, who lent us three jeeps for the purpose.

I found Battalion H.Q. digging rapidly in a corner of a field just outside Secqueville. Harry told me that the companies had reported twenty-seven casualties, very few considering what a lot of mortaring and shelling there had been. We took sixty-five prisoners. One said they had had no rations for five days; they certainly looked a poor lot.

It is a lovely summer evening. I have just come in from visiting two companies and everybody is in excellent spirits.

August 9th.

Yesterday was a great day for the Highland Division and all our objectives were taken. Only Tilly gave much trouble, and the second of the two Seaforth battalions had to be put in to complete its capture. These two battalions had eighty-odd

casualties between them in taking the place, but they killed a large number of Germans and took 150 prisoners, including five officers.

The Polish Armoured Division is in front of us, but we can't find out where they have got. David says they never send back any information and only come back when they want to draw more rations.

August 10th.

Secqueville-la-Campagne has been well and truly flattened out by the bombing. I walked round the battlefield and found that only three Huns were killed by our barrage. They were all dug in and not a single dug-out had had a direct hit.

There is talk of us taking over St. Sylvain from the Poles to-night, but I gather they have still to capture it.

August 11th.

At six last night we were put at one hour's notice, while Harry and the Brigadier went off to recon St. Sylvain, though they were not able to do much as the Poles were still attacking.

At 11.30 p.m. the Priests arrived but we didn't move off till one. I shall always remember that moonlight drive through several ghostly, shattered villages. When I thought about it I was slightly apprehensive: only four hours left till daylight and we had to find our way to the place, take over, and be in position ready to repel a counter-attack in that time. But I didn't let it worry me for long for I find these moves into battle, whether on foot or in a vehicle, strangely exhilarating—long may this last!

Harry met us on the way. The Poles had reported a very tough fight but had captured St. Sylvain, he said. We were to debus three miles short of it, as he didn't want the noise of tracks to reach the enemy. He jeeped ahead with the company commanders, leaving me to bring up the Battalion.

We reached the edge of the town at 3.30 a.m., but there was no sign of the company guides and the first light of dawn began to appear in the east. Eventually the company commanders arrived. The Poles were all drunk, they said, so there could be

no proper take over. We trickled into the place by companies, and by the time we began to dig it was broad daylight. We worked feverishly to get the anti-tank guns and M.M.G.s into position and the mortars laid on to S.O.S. tasks, but we might have saved ourselves the trouble for the expected counter-attack never came. There was a great clatter of transport and a huge column of dust as the last of the Poles, driving much too fast, left the town, and sure enough down came the shells.

As soon as we were more or less firm we began to breathe more comfortably and to look around us and adjust our positions. Battalion H.Q. had been hurriedly established in a cow-barn, almost the first building we found as we entered the town. We now moved forward to the former German H.Q., a biggish house in the main street. The actual command post, with the maps, wireless sets and telephones, is established in a big dug-out in the garden, and we shall use the house to feed and sleep in. There is room for about six or eight people in the command post and it has a good solid roof, but there is a huge hole at each end where the steps lead down. A shell might well land there, so we are getting the Pioneers to see what they can do about it. The first shell arrived while we were all having lunch outside in the sun. I cannot understand how nobody was hit as it burst in the garden about twenty yards from us. Since then there has been a lot of shelling and we wonder if we were foolish to have chosen such an obvious place as the former German H.Q. While looking for a good house I walked all over the town north of the main street (the Black Watch are holding the south side of it) and saw no sign of the very severe fighting of which the Poles spoke. To be precise, I found four dead Huns and three dead Poles. The latter were a Platoon H.Q.—officer, sergeant and wireless operator, looking as lifelike as three wax figures. They were still sitting upright, leaning back against the wall, the operator holding the microphone in front of his mouth. They had been killed instantly by a shell which burst against the wall above them.

After lunch we sent the carrier platoon to recce a small wood to the north. Moir came up on the air and said it was lousy with Huns, and through the R/T set we could hear the spandau

fire. Harry told him to withdraw. Then David Martin, the I.O., who is always indefatigable, came in to say that with a telescope and from a roof he had seen Germans eating their dinners in a field 3,000 yards away, so we turned the gunners on to them. About the same time somebody pointed out an enemy O.P. built in a tree. The Battery Commander¹ said he would shoot it down; we all stood on the roof of the command post to watch this performance, but the meeting was quickly broken up when shells began to come back at us. Then somebody started a scare that the enemy were forming up to attack: they were coming through a cornfield 1,200 yards away. It was awfully hard to see as the sun was shining so brightly on the corn that there was a kind of mirage or heat haze. But we easily persuaded ourselves that the enemy were indeed advancing towards us. So we "stood to" and fired the artillery and mortars for all we were worth. Meanwhile I was going round Battalion H.Q. supervising the fighting positions of all the odd signallers, clerks, policemen and batmen, while the R.S.M. followed behind issuing grenades. Without any doubt, there was one German tank in the corn. We could see it as plain as a house and asked the gunners to fire a "victor" target (every gun within range). So bang went several thousand pounds and down came the stuff and the tank withdrew. I don't believe there was ever anything there except this one tank doing a recce, but it was a good exercise as it disclosed one or two weaknesses in our communications and defensive fire arrangements, which have been put right. We are also strengthening the forward positions with wire and trip flares now that it is dark.

The Huns have evacuated all the inhabitants with them. Presumably it was thought that they knew too much about their dispositions. There were a lot of enemy here, and their withdrawal was premeditated as they have left nothing behind, not even so much as a box of matches.

We "stood-to" from ten to-night but no attack developed. We "stood-down" physically at 11.15, and mentally also at midnight when 154 Brigade passed through us to attack the ridge beyond. I then came down into this cellar to turn in.

¹ See note "Artillery" in Appendix I.

August 12th.

There was a lot of shelling during the night, especially at about 4 a.m., when about forty shells landed on top of this house and in the garden all around. The big elm beside the command post and the wall behind it were badly knocked about. The only casualty was the Battery Commander's signaller, who was sleeping in the armoured scout-car, hit in the foot by a splinter which went through the steel door. I felt very secure down in this little cellar.

Shelling started again at 7 a.m. and has been going on intermittently ever since.

The day proper started with the news that Nap Murray has got a Division in Italy, which means that Harry is temporarily commanding the Brigade and I the Battalion. This information galvanised me into immediate activity and I went round the whole Battalion and had a good strafe about small points like alertness, camouflage and cleanliness.

When I got back for a late breakfast we heard that 154 Brigade's attack last night was most successful and that they took all their objectives, but 7th Argylls had fifty-six casualties, all handled by Bert in our R.A.P. Their doctor is a new-comer who doesn't yet know the form, and when the casualties occurred was on the move forward with nowhere to treat them. When last seen he was digging feverishly in a potato field.

The Poles made an awful mess of things this morning. Their Recce Regiment, which was milling about in front of 154 Brigade all night, turned round and fled back through them in disorder at first light. This brought down a murder stonk on 154, and the Black Watch and Argylls had another sixty-five casualties, including seven officers.

At noon the news was not so hot. 154 Brigade have been counter-attacked and the enemy have got into one of their company positions. The next thing we heard, from a Canadian major who dropped in to lunch, was that the Canadians to the south have taken a bad knock from 12 S.S. Division and lost fifty-three out of sixty-five tanks. One regiment lost the C.O. and all its squadron commanders. This is no doubt the cause of the order

we got this morning that we are to stand firm here and not try to swan northwards up the valley, as was the previous intention.

This tank reverse, by no means the first, will add fresh heat to the tank-design controversy. Since I have been out here I have frequently heard how inferior our tanks are to the Huns'. Their Tigers and Panthers are so heavily armoured that they are exceedingly difficult to knock out, whereas our Shermans brew up with the first direct hit. The result is that our tank crews have a definite inferiority complex, and who can blame them? Stokes has raised the matter time and again in Parliament and always been snubbed.

We have been placed temporarily under 154 Brigade. It is commanded by James Oliver, a Territorial Black Watch of whom everybody has a very high opinion. Indeed I should not think any division anywhere has ever had three better or more trusted commanders than Jim Cassels (152), Nap Murray (153) and James Oliver (154).

August 13th.

I was up early and round the whole Battalion at "stand-to" except A Company, who were back in bed by the time I got there.

There has been more shelling to-day and the C.O. of the Divisional Anti-tank Regiment was killed driving through the town in his jeep. We have had a discussion as to how many shells have landed in St. Sylvain in the last two days, and the general estimate is about 2,000. Yet there have been less than fifty casualties among the 2,000 troops in the place.

This morning James Oliver took me up in his armoured car to see the two Black Watch battalions on the wooded ridge in front. We found that 7th Black Watch H.Q. was overlooked from a ridge 1,000 yards away to the left, and a few snipers on it were making a nuisance of themselves, so the Brigadier ordered an artillery shoot. First we had scale two and then scale three, a lovely shoot right along the top of the ridge, and it is to be repeated at irregular intervals. The two battalions were well dug in. I could not but notice how nice the red hackle of the Black Watch looks. That little touch of scarlet on every man's

tam o' shanter has every metal cap-badge in the service beat. Hardly anybody in this division wears a tin hat except when actually attacking.

From 7th Black Watch we went to 1st Black Watch, and found the C.O., stark naked, having a bath in front of his command post. They had a lot of shelling during the night, but only one casualty, caused by a direct hit on a slit-trench. Some tanks were hidden among the trees, and the Brigadier had a chat with Cracroft, the C.O. There was a small German cemetery in the area: about twenty large Maltese crosses with the swastika in the centre of each. Most of the dates were of a fortnight ago. One very seldom sees German graves; it is said that they are not thought good for morale so the Hun usually cheats, burying half a dozen in each individual grave. As we walked around we talked to some of the men, who were shaving or breakfasting; one was washing in a German steel helmet. We passed a 'gruesome sight, a corpse half-buried but with the two arms sticking out of the ground in a supplicating attitude.

We are now back under command of our own Brigade and Harry had an O Group this evening. I was driving back for it down the long dusty road. There was a despatch rider on a motor-cycle about fifty yards ahead of me. My thoughts were far away in England when there was a crack and a splash of dust and smoke, and the D.R. went head-over-heels. He had been hit in the neck and was stone dead. We collected his despatches, identity discs and wallet, lifted him and his cycle on to the side of the road and continued on our way. Brigade H.Q. was in a narrow valley, with the guns firing all round us. The orders boiled down to an attack by 152 Brigade and the Canadians to-morrow, followed by 153 the day after, when the batting order is to be 5-7th, 5th B.W. and then ourselves.

It was a ghostly ride back in the dark, with the guns banging and flashing all around.

August 14th.

We are sending out five or six patrols every night, most of them to places where I know quite well there are no enemy, to give practice and confidence to young officers and N.C.O.s. It

is somewhat exhausting because one cannot turn in until the last one is safely back, but I am sure it will pay a dividend in the long run.

This afternoon A Company cleared a small hamlet to the north of us after an artillery concentration had been fired on it. They took six prisoners for the loss of one corporal killed.

The shelling of St. Sylvain has been much lighter to-day, but we shall all be glad to leave it to-morrow.

I have just heard that Cracroft, the tank C.O., was killed by shellfire after we had visited him yesterday.

August 15th.

This morning we got orders to move out and occupy Glatigny, about two miles away, the armour being some distance beyond it. I went on ahead with a small recon group to choose the company areas.

I saw 154 Brigade H.Q. and stopped to pass the time of day. It was about this time that the Lancasters started to bomb the gun lines behind us. For one hour this went on and everybody was powerless to stop it.

Glatigny seemed to be under enemy observation because first the tanks on the far side of the village and then the village itself, just after we had entered it, got heavily and accurately shelled, though I was hanged if I could see where the observation was from, unless it was a village, one of the many Le Mesnils, on the left. I took some of my party down a lane running along a ridge leading out of the village. Suddenly there was the usual whistle in crescendo which signalled a covey of shells on the way. With one accord we all lay flat and heard them landing all round us. Then there was a particularly loud crack as a shell burst twelve feet away—I paced out the distance later. I thought it was in the road beside me, for the dust was such that we were in pitch darkness for what seemed a minute, and four nostrils were choked with gunpowder—or whatever the bursting charge may be—so that it was some hours before I could rid myself of the acrid smell. I could hear somebody whimpering in the darkness behind me and Donald Howorth shouting, "Lie still, you bloody fool." When I could see I found that the Signal Sergeant,

Rae, was dead, and the R.S.M., Thomson, slightly wounded in the head but bleeding profusely, and Howorth was tying him up. He himself had a few punctures in his thigh. Only Petrie, second-in-command of C Company, and myself were untouched.

I went back along the track to where there were, most conveniently, some empty slits dug by 2nd Seaforths, who had just moved out. I told the company commanders to put their men into them, and that we would not occupy Glatigny until dark as I thought it was under enemy observation.

The companies moved off successively, starting soon after 9 p.m. There had been no shelling for three hours, which I took to mean that the Germans were moving their guns back. Of this I was glad, because 152 are about to attack on our right. Whenever any unit is involved in battle I always think of my friends and hope to God they will come through safely. Thus I thought of Richard Fleming and Charm and their three young children, as I plodded along in the gloaming across the stubble that led to Glatigny, and wished that any other battalion but 5th Seaforths were attacking to-night. Most people seem able to accept casualties, which is just as well; but for my part I can never overlook the tragedy that each one means to some far away, stricken home. The sadness of it all is always with me.

About eleven the Luftwaffe paid us a visit. They dropped a cluster of parachute flares and then started anti-personnel bombing. Each aircraft let loose a thousand or so of these tiny bombs, each hardly larger than a stick of shaving soap. One could hear the swish as the shower came through the air, and then the steady drumming as they exploded. Unfortunately D Company, the last to arrive, had only dug down about eighteen inches by this time and they had twenty-three casualties. Most were only lightly wounded, but two were killed and one of them was Glass, the young Canadian officer who came to us ten days ago.

August 16th.

After breakfast I laid on a plot to clear Le Mesnil, so that there should be no more doubt about observation on Glatigny, but had to cancel it on getting orders to concentrate 1st Gordons at Percy for an attack that afternoon. Just as we were moving

off we got word that we have lost thirteen out of sixteen A Echelon trucks in yesterday's bombing by the R.A.F., though luckily no men. The absurd thing is that there were no direct ground to air communications which could have stopped it at once. The channel of communications is Division—Corps—Army—Army Group—Supreme H.Q.—Air Ministry—Bomber Command—Group—R.A.F. Station (or something very like it), so no wonder it took over an hour to get through. Like the bombing by the Fortresses on August 8th, it is quite inexcusable for we are still close to the great industrial city of Caen, which stands up like Manchester in the middle of the Sahara, and visibility has been perfect each time. I forgot to record that a Canadian Spitfire pilot, after vainly trying to divert the first two waves of Fortresses that were bombing the Canadian gun lines, deliberately shot down the leader of the third wave, to the accompaniment of tumultuous applause from the scattered, frightened soldiery below. The crew all baled out.

In Percy the companies dispersed and got under cover in farm buildings. I was talking to Harry at the main cross-roads when there was a stupendous bang fifty yards away, and the whole church tower came crashing down in a huge grey cloud of smoke. Out of it, after a few minutes, emerged Maurice Burnett, the Field Regiment C.O., looking like I don't know what—smothered in grey dust from head to foot. He had been standing in the porch, the arch of which fortunately held, and he was untouched. Alan Brockie, the F.O.O., had blown himself up on a booby-trap when he went up the tower to get a better view. It is very sad as he is one of the old sweats who has gone the whole way through the desert with the Division and everybody was fond of him.

I tied up everything with great care and we got off at 5 p.m. : A Company, under Jim Robertson, in the lead with a squadron of tanks, then myself in my carrier with the wireless sets, and B following behind. As we started off I was conscious of the fact that at last I was about to realise an ambition of some years' standing—to command a battalion in battle.

Our orders were to go as far as we reasonably could, though it was thought that we should be held up before very long by

one or other of a series of bridges being blown. I had selected three possible concentration areas and gave them the jargon code names, Bread, Meat and Wine, so that I could quickly get the Battalion firm in any one of them. The column went on and disappeared down a long, tree-covered lane. I had been unable to see anything when I had tried to recce earlier, and now all I could see were the backs of the last men of A Company H.Q. halted in front of me. I heard Spandau fire, then the Brownings of the tanks, then silence, and I called up Jim and said, "Why can't you get on?"

The leading tank reported that the first bridge was blown, then all the tanks started to get ditched until seven out of ten were bogged. So I sent "Bread" to B Company and they went forward to concentrate on the left of A, two anti-tank guns following them. I asked the squadron commander to send a troop off to recce another bridge to the right. There had been mortar fire in front, and now the wounded began to come back in jeeps: some men with blood-soaked dressings on their stomachs, and their privates exposed where the trousers had been cut away. Wounded always come back like this down the axis of advance, to encourage as it were all the others waiting their turn to go up into battle. After an hour the tank troop had got nowhere, and the squadron commander admitted to me that the troop-leader was windy and useless. So I sent off a section on foot, who soon came back to say that this bridge was also blown. Co-operation with the tanks is hell for the infantry commander as he has no wireless on the tank net, nor can one give the tanks an infantry set as they have no room nor any one to work it. So the battalion commander has to climb up on the tank every time he wants to talk to the tank commander.

After visiting A and B Companies I returned on foot to the Battalion. I began to move them all up to concentrate in Bread, but Harry came up on the air and said that we shall be moving in another direction to-morrow, so we could have the choice of spending the night in Bread or returning to Percy. This latter I jumped at as there had been a lot of mortaring on Bread. We returned to Percy and I put everybody in barns and buildings with only one sentry in each company area. I then went down the

village street to Brigade H.Q., intending to tell Harry that everybody is exhausted, having had little sleep last night at Glatigny since most of it was spent in digging, and that I hoped there would be no move to-morrow after all. But Charles Napier, the Brigade Major, forestalled me by saying that the other two battalions have had a worse time but are quite fit to go on to-morrow. I thought he seemed very unsympathetic as I felt so utterly exhausted, but already, one hour later, after a meal, I feel a new man. There is no doubt that we must keep cracking on, whatever we feel like, now that we have the Huns on the run.

August 17th.

What a day!

Troop-carriers arrived at 7 a.m. and I had them and all our own transport marshalled in a big meadow. Then, leaving Jim Robertson to bring on the battalion, I rushed off in my carrier, following Harry in his jeep. We seemed to be going a long way and in a south-east direction. Passing through St. Pierre, we saw French for the first time since Ranville, and they all waved madly at us. Beyond St. Pierre we stopped at a cross-roads just behind the Black Watch. At that moment the General arrived, and Harry and he went into a huddle over the map.

Then Harry came back and told me that 1st Gordons' objective was St. Marais-aux-Anglais, a hamlet about four miles away to the east; we were to clear Deux Marais and some woods on the way there. As the tanks were still behind, I went on with a section of carriers as an escort, to reconnoitre the first part of the route. All the French we passed came running out with garlands of flowers, milk and wine. They all tried to be very helpful with information about the Germans. They pointed out a farm with three soldiers in it, but *pas méchants*, they said, and we collected them on the way. Soon we were stopped by two dead horses blocking the lane, so, leaving two carriers to clear them away, I returned to give out orders near the cross-roads. Just as I had begun to do so an old Frenchman thrust himself upon us. There was a dead Mongolian German on his farm, he said, and was it permitted to bury him? One or two shells were coming down around us, and once or twice we flattened ourselves for a moment

or two. Then the Luftwaffe came over, about twenty fighters streaking back to the Fatherland just as fast as they could fly. They were very low overhead, and I managed to fire off the best part of one Bren magazine at them as they passed.

In due course we started off. Deux Marais is just a church, a school and a farm or two, and once through it we shook out into three parallel company columns, each with a troop of tanks for the wood-clearing we had been ordered to do. Soon afterwards I heard firing on the left, and, after a lot of difficulty as the country was so close, managed to find D Company H.Q. Murray Reekie was upset as he had lost the whole of one platoon. It had been caught by cross-fire from two light automatics, the platoon commander, Sergeant Walker, had been killed and the three section commanders wounded. The men, leaderless and with several killed and wounded, had disappeared in the undergrowth and had not been seen since. The woods were much thicker than we expected and the tanks were finding difficulty in getting through. After a time I found the commanders of the other two companies near the track which was our axis, and tried to co-ordinate things for the last part of the advance. There was still quite a lot of small-arms fire but we did not stop.

In a little while, rather to my surprise, I found myself leading the advance in my carrier, with my finger very much on the trigger of the Bren, driving up the approach to the Chateau of St. Marais-aux-Anglais. As quickly as possible the four companies moved out into defensive positions, while awaiting the arrival of the vehicles. The ground rose sharply to a wooded ridge beyond the Chateau and I felt somewhat insecure with two companies perched precariously on the edge of it and the rest of us below. Moreover, I felt sure that the enemy must have observation from that ridge, and sure enough down came repeated heavy concentrations upon the track through the wood along which all our mortars, anti-tank guns, M.M.G.s, jeeps, carriers and the R.A.P. had to come. I felt desperately sorry for them, but there was nothing I could do about it except tell the gunners to shoot at every known enemy battery. I have no doubt that there was a good deal of quiet bravery on the part of certain officers who kept the column trickling forward down that bad

and difficult track. Meanwhile there were still a few pockets of spandau boys in the woods we had passed through. We had to send out one or two small parties of tanks and infantry to round them up. Gallop, the mortar officer, and his platoon sergeant were unfortunately both wounded in taking some prisoners. The sods played the usual trick of waving white flags, then shooting when those two began to walk over towards them, though indeed they should both have known better.

It was a relief when I felt that things were sufficiently far advanced to be able to enter the Chateau and sit down. It is a lovely place. There is an old tower built in the 15th century by the English who occupied Normandy during the Hundred Years' War until Joan of Arc turned us out, hence the name "aux Anglais." The tower is modernised with running water and electricity, and a 200-year-old farmhouse is built on to it. Inside we found a large family and a number of refugees, and it is difficult to know who belongs to whom. They have been awfully kind to us with gifts of wine, butter and eggs. Unfortunately one or two French working in the fields were hit during our advance, and they have been carried into the R.A.P. and are being evacuated along with our own wounded through our medical channels.

War is full of strange contrasts. I had to pass through the R.A.P. on my way up to bed in the tower, and noticed a little ginger kitten asleep at the foot of a stretcher on which lay a corpse shrouded in the usual army blanket.

August 18th and 19th.

In the morning we buried our dead under a tree in front of this beautiful chateau. I know the graves will be well tended by these kind people. I wish they could all be left to lie where they have been so tenderly placed by those who loved them, near where they fell. I hate the idea of them being dug up and re-interred in some military cemetery, where the grave-stones will remain for posterity and their bodies will be dressed by the right, regimented in death. Left where they now lie, they would serve for as long as is necessary as a reminder of the price that Britain has paid to free Europe. Many would disappear in course of time,

and that, too, is not to be regretted; thank goodness most of the graves of those who died more than a hundred years ago have long been obliterated.

This afternoon Harry had an O Group at the side of the road. It broke up very quickly when an aircraft was heard about five miles away, for everybody is scared stiff of the R.A.F. All day the Typhoons have been strafing the roads behind us. The General and Harry twice had to get into a ditch this morning, and Jim Cassels had his Brigade H.Q. brought down on top of his head and his Brigade Major, John Thornton, killed. The orders were for an assault crossing of the River Vie by 153 Brigade to-night. 5-7th Gordons cross first, then 5th B.W. pass through and get on to a hill, the code name for which is Ben Nevis, then we occupy another piece of high ground on their left, Ben Lomond.

I got back to find a great scare at the Chateau as the gunners, God knows why, had fired one or two smoke-shells into the garden and somebody suggested this was to mark a bomb line for the R.A.F. While I gave out orders we all drank champagne, produced by our kind hostess. It was quite simple: order of march, provisional sub-unit objectives on Ben Lomond and patrolling beyond it, artillery tasks at call and that was about all.

There was a lot more champagne at supper and, feeling in mighty good form, I got into my carrier and went up to Harry's H.Q., in a concrete gun emplacement which looks more like a garage. The subsequent battle as I heard it over the R/T during the night was most dramatic. First the C.O. of 5-7th Gordons, Hugh Blair-Imrie, came up on the air and reported that the tanks were blocking the road. Then we heard that there was a lot of small-arms opposition in the area of the blown bridge, then that 5-7th Gordons were getting across all right. After this there was silence and I slept for half an hour. I woke up to hear Harry talking to the General on the phone.

"The one thing I cannot afford is to have the R.A.F. operating anywhere within fifty miles of me," I heard him say.

Then an officer of the 5-7th came up on the set and said that the C.O. had been killed. This was followed by the news that the

bridging material was blocked on the road behind the tanks. I felt dreadfully sorry for Harry. He got up and went off to see what could be done. An hour later he returned to say that they had started to build the bridge and that he had just launched the Black Watch. We heard some pretty heavy shelling and all went outside to listen. It was pitch dark. There was no doubt that it was coming down where the Black Watch were, and soon afterwards the news came over the air that their C.O., Bill Bradford, was wounded, and the Battery Commander killed in addition to a number of others in Battalion H.Q.

Harry was not prepared to release us until 5th B.W. were more or less firm, but as daylight was approaching I begged him to let us go so that we could cross the very open river valley under cover of darkness. At 6 a.m. we were put at thirty minutes' notice, and I rushed back to the Chateau and had the quickest shave and breakfast of my life, then back to Harry's H.Q. to get final orders while the Battalion followed. Here I met the General, who told me to cut transport down to the very minimum—two mortars, one anti-tank gun and an ammunition carrier was his suggestion—in order not to risk blocking the narrow lane leading down to the bridge if something were hit by a shell and brewed up. So I peeled off a few superfluous vehicles into a field and off we went, Bruce Rae and C Company in the lead, then myself in my carrier. The 18-sets to companies are so unreliable that I always have to use D.R.s, so two cocky, wee Gordons, Lance-Corporal Hogg and Private Nichol, were following close behind me on motor-bikes. Little did I know that both were to be killed before this foul day was over.

To my relief there was a thick ground mist and C Company got across without any trouble. I followed at their heels, but stopped in the lee of a small barn a hundred yards beyond the river, to await the other companies who had been told to start ten minutes after C. There were a few Black Watch round the building and one of them moved a yard or two in front of it. There was a sharp crack, and he fell writhing on the ground in such agony that after a moment or two he had fainted, the bullet having hit him in the forearm and broken the bone. He is the only man whom I have so far seen in pain from a wound,

the shock being normally so great that nothing much is felt for some hours.

I told the tanks to brass up the general direction from which this shot had been fired, and sent the other two companies through as quickly as possible. Then, as soon as I had reported progress on the wireless to Brigade and ordered up the rest of the F Echelon vehicles, I jumped into my carrier and went up to the companies, passing a herd of eleven dead cows on the way.

Before long I came upon A and B Company Commanders, who were having a confab in an orchard, and they said that there were spandaus firing to their left. Neither had heard any word of C Company. I told Jim Robertson that I would take one of the tank troops and go and look for C, and that he was to take the other and help A and B; the I.O. would remain with my carrier and follow on with the vehicles. Of course, the tanks should have started out with the companies instead of trying to catch up afterwards, but they had found it difficult to cross the river. I made an error in going off with this one troop of tanks. I had little enough control before, with the wireless to companies working so badly, but now I lost it all. I got the troop commander to let me ride in the co-driver's place. The inside of the tank was full of apples which had been knocked off the branches and fallen through the open hatches. In due course we found C Company on their objective. Bruce said that there was an awkward spandau firing away on the right, so I told him to take these tanks and deal with it. He pointed out that he was the only officer in that company, so I told him I would look after it until he came back, another error since I was supposed to be commanding a battalion and not a company. I collected them into a rather smaller area and started them digging. Then B Company arrived, and Bill MacMillan said that A had been badly shot-up, and Johnny Grant and Needs had both been killed. This was a fearful blow. Soon afterwards A Company arrived under Murray Reekie (A having absorbed the remainder of D two days ago). A and B now began to dig in alongside C on a razor-edge ridge.

At the bottom of the steep slope, and not much more than a hundred yards behind the centre company, was a quarry into

which I put Battalion H.Q.; the vehicles began to disperse themselves all round in the valley. Then, starting at about 2 p.m. and lasting for about thirty minutes, there was very heavy shelling of this area behind the crest. Three of our carriers were soon blazing away merrily. Unfortunately the driver of one was trapped in his seat, presumably wounded, and terrible were his shrieks as he realised that he was beginning to burn to death. The British soldier is always willing to take a big risk to save the life of a comrade, but so murderous was the shelling coming down at this time that all knew it would mean certain death to move from the slits and ditches in which they were lying, and nobody attempted it. We lost George Stewart, the anti-tank officer, killed, and nearly twenty N.C.O.s and men in this shelling. For a time we thought that Gordon Birss, who commanded S Company, had gone too as he had not passed through our R.A.P. with the wounded, and there were five bodies which were unrecognisable as the result of the tree under which they were crouching receiving a direct hit. Later it transpired that he had gone through the Black Watch R.A.P.

The Battalion seemed to me to be very shaken. I went to the wireless and asked Harry if I could have a company of 5-7th Gordons under my command, to thicken up the front. He said this was not possible, but that he could offer me an anti-tank battery instead. I said I would be glad to have them, provided that they came with their light automatics and rifles and left their guns behind, as the going was pretty bad. I sent a D.R. back for various good types who at the moment were out of battle: the Padre, Pipe-Major, Pioneer Officer and the Orderly Room Sergeant, who would be useful at Battalion H.Q. I had heard that the division on the left had been counter-attacked and to some extent driven back, and I was determined that this should not happen to us, so I went round the officers and told them that this was a test of character and we had to get a proper grip of the men. They are all excellent fellows and I soon realised that this was just what they were doing. With some difficulty we hauled one or two anti-tank guns up the hill to supplement Butler's troop of three Shermans who were already there, and which I am keeping in spite of an order

to send them back to the rest of the regiment concentrating in rear.

Harry arrived just as I was beginning to feel neglected. He said that he had been very busy with 5th B.W., who have had rather a sticky time. Bill Bradford's wound is in the arm and not too bad. He was very upset about us having nearly fifty casualties, but said that every one is very pleased with the Brigade.

The command post is in a cave fifteen feet wide and ten feet deep, with a wall of sandbags across the entrance. It is most comfortable, but I am dead tired, and with "stand-to" at 5.30 the night will be all too short.

August 20th.

There was a bit of a flap last night as Bill came up on the air at about nine to tell me that an attack was coming in on his left, i.e., between our two battalions. I thought it was probably no more than a German patrol, but took the precaution of firing the D.F. From just outside our command post we could see a tank or S.P. gun on the crest of the hill, firing tracer at the Black Watch. The Watch were all firing back like blazes but I told our companies not to do so unless they were actually attacked, so that the Hun would not be able to pin-point our positions. A little later we heard a succession of heavy stonks coming down not far off, and for a few moments I thought they were being fired at us in preparation for an attack. However, it soon became clear that it was our own guns firing a programme for "friends on left," as we say on the R/T when anxious not to give away an identification.

We have sent out several recce patrols to-day to try to find out what the enemy is up to. A young officer called Beardwell led a particularly successful one. There are plenty of Huns in front of us and they are digging in. There was an O Group at Brigade at 6 p.m. and another at 8.30. At the latter I have been told to capture a hill three miles away by noon to-morrow. This will give us time to get the latest information about the enemy, who may well alter their dispositions or pull out altogether during the night, before giving out orders. So the morning starts with several patrols.

August 21st.

The last patrol was back before 9 a.m. and they all reported no enemy seen, so we moved off at 10.30. Meanwhile Harry had sent 5-7th Gordons through with some tanks, and before very long I came upon Colonel Jolly, who commands 144 Regiment, R.A.C. I was a bit nervous on meeting him as I had disobeyed orders in not sending back that troop of tanks two nights ago; so I got all my excuses ready, but he did not refer to it. Then Harry arrived and told me to pass through 5-7th Gordons and take La Forge Vallée, two miles beyond, with a squadron of tanks in support. I arranged for an artillery concentration and told the tanks that I wanted them to shoot at the objective from the right while we attacked from the left. Allan Jolly said he didn't want to interfere but he had seen lots of clever plans like this before and it wouldn't work. So when I gave out orders it was for the tanks and infantry to move together in sight of each other the whole time. We put in a tremendous attack, to find there was nobody there. As we were consolidating round the position there was a slight scare when enemy were reported coming round our left rear. I moved the reserve company towards that direction, but it proved to be only some Germans trying to give themselves up. Unfortunately somebody fired at them and they disappeared.

Apart from a couple of small farms and some cottages, La Forge Vallée consists of a large stud farm and training establishment. To my surprise, I found a note in Harry's handwriting pinned to the door of the office, which read, "This place belongs to an Englishman. Respect it." I went inside and looked at the photographs of horses and close finishes on the wall, and the saddles, bits and other tackle. A pile of bills (or maybe receipts) stood on the desk and I was intrigued to see that they were all made out to one Sam Ambler. Meanwhile Battalion H.Q. was digging trenches in and around the yard and loose-boxes, and the mortars were setting themselves up in the stallion paddock. The command post itself is dug deep in the tan of the riding school. There is a German equipment store here but no watches or field-glasses; only useless stuff like M.G. parts, mortar tripods, anti-gas kit, pack saddlery. In fact it is all so useless that we

think we will do the right thing for once and get credit for reporting its location.

A young Frenchman who claims to have taken fourteen German prisoners in the last two days came here after tea. He said he brought a message from Mr. Ambler, who with his French wife were living underground in a cavern not far away, to the effect that he was expecting me to visit him. I was so intrigued by this impertinent cave-dweller that, later in the evening, David Martin and I went to visit him. Our guide led us to a narrow slit in the ground half-way down a steep slope. As we squeezed through it we saw a twinkle of light deep down in the bowels of the earth below. Gradually the passage opened wider till we could stand upright, and soon we found ourselves in huge halls and passages. There, living like Eskimos, in groups each of about half a dozen families, knee to knee, were fully a hundred people. In the central position, sitting like an Eastern potentate on a divan (of horse rugs) and sultan of this odd community, but blinking through the thick lenses of a pair of steel-framed spectacles, was the fabulous Mr. Ambler, once of Hoxton. He promptly produced an excellent bottle of champagne which he said a German officer had given him to share with the first Englishman he met. We were not actually the first he had seen as five prisoners, the crew of a tank, and one of them badly burnt, had been confined for three days in his yard. His wife pushed food, including a roast chicken and two bottles of calvados, through the fence to them, he said. He is manager for an American called Strasburger, and the blood stock in his charge is worth a quarter of a million. The horses are all out at grass, hidden away on small, obscure farmsteads. He had also some pedigree cattle which had not been so fortunate. The Germans had killed them all; sometimes they had only taken the shoulder off a beast, leaving the rest to rot.

To-night it is raining for the first time for weeks. Always will I remember and give thanks for the wonderful weather of this momentous summer.

August 22nd, and my Birthday.

Not a shell in the Battalion area all yesterday, touch wood and thank God, though 154 Brigade in front were stopped by very heavy shelling and three times it came crashing down on the railway line half a mile to our left, where we have absolutely damn all.

Ten men deserted from A Company yesterday morning, just before we left for what looked like another battle. They have seen their company continuously reduced by casualties, including nine officers, three of whom went during the last three days. They all marched back together under a corporal carrying their arms and kit, so of course everybody who passed them on their way back thought it was quite in order. I wonder how far they will get.

This afternoon there was another surge forward and 1st Gordons, tailing rather behind, were told to find a place in a given area where we can rest for three or four days. We have found a delightful spot consisting of small fields with nice leafy trees all round and a few pleasant orchards. I have ordered B Echelon to come up and arranged for a distribution of N.A.A.F.I. packs and have applied for the mobile baths. There are lots of new potatoes and runner-beans here, and we have managed to get a few eggs and are negotiating for a goose. I am sitting on the grass, drinking gin while supper is being prepared. The weather is once more perfect and we are going to have a lovely time here.

August 23rd, and the most miserable day that I can remember.

David as duty officer woke me at 4.30, and I thought a Panzer division at least was breaking through. He said that a message had just come in that I was required to meet Harry at the bridge in Lisieux at seven, and have one company down there at 7.30, and another at thirty minutes' notice from that time. This was because 5-7th Gordons, who were in the town, were having a spot of bother from snipers and an additional company or two might be a help to them.

I went down there at seven and found that the town has been badly bombed. All the centre of it is flat. Later in the day I

heard that we bombed it on D-Day to prevent the Huns bringing reserves through it, after dropping leaflets to warn the inhabitants. But most of the leaflets drifted elsewhere and few took any notice of those that did arrive. Lisieux used to be a famous religious centre; the British will never bomb such a place, the French said. I met Harry on the bridge which the sappers were just finishing, and we walked through two-thirds of the town without a shot being fired. The French told us that the Germans were holding a ridge on the far side of it, about three hundred yards from the last row of houses. Certainly we saw five of them running across in front of a bungalow on the hill four hundred yards away. I took a standing pot at them with a rifle.

Harry gave me some tanks and told me to take that high ground. So I told Jim Robertson, whose company had just arrived, to meet the tanks at the station and then move on to the hill. I sent some carriers back to fetch C and told Bruce to occupy the row of houses immediately facing the high ground, from which I hoped he would be in a position to support B Company. I also sent back for A, and no sooner had it arrived than Harry gave it a job to do, to clean up another sector of the town. This took away my only reserve, though I am quite sure Harry would not have done so had I pointed this out.

The guts of the matter is that the 5-7th had walked into the town and occupied two-thirds of it with nothing more than slight opposition from snipers, and I did not appreciate that there was any change in the situation and that a full-scale battalion attack might be required of us. So in this way the battle got off on the wrong leg, and when this happens it is always difficult to retrieve the situation. B and C Companies soon reported they were in difficulties, so I told Harry that I was going forward to see what was happening. There was a Corps stop on artillery firing beyond a certain grid line as 7th Armoured Division would be coming that way, and this in effect meant that we were forbidden to shoot at our objective. Harry now said I could use the guns, and I pointed out that this would mean withdrawing B and C, who were too close. He said I wasn't to

do this as it would take too long, and that the important thing was to hurry.

I then set out in my carrier along the railway line, the route that B Company had taken. Before long we came to some points and the carrier got stuck, so, telling it to return and come round by another route, I walked ahead, feeling very naked going along the top of the embankment in full view from our objective five hundred yards away.

In front of the railway station I found two Shermans. One was the squadron-commander's which had broken down, and the other belonged to his second-in-command. The latter had just come back to report, and he told me that B Company had got a foothold on the edge of the ridge but that only one of his tanks had been able to get up there. I could hear a lot of firing and was anxious to reach the company as quickly as possible, so jumped into his tank. I then found he was unwilling to move back up the hill he had just come down until he could get another tank to accompany him, and I had to give him a direct order to do so.

I found Jim and B Company in a quarry half-way up the hill, with C Company in the row of houses just behind. Jim told me that they had been stopped by very heavy light automatic fire, that a subaltern named Donald had been killed and nearly half the company were casualties. Moreover, most of them were lying out somewhere in front, which meant that there was now no possibility of using artillery. I said that I would get the tanks round to the right and on to the ridge, and that with their support C Company would advance. I sent the I.O. back to bring up A Company, and my carrier with the wireless sets.

The next hour was spent in futile attempts by the tanks to get on to the ridge. I got so angry that I jumped into the co-driver's seat in the tank belonging to the second-in-command, who was in charge in the absence of his squadron-commander still down at the railway station, and ordered him to proceed. We went about twenty yards and then it broke down. (7th Armoured Division found no difficulty in getting up there when they arrived two hours later.) Soon afterwards Harry ordered us to stay put.

David Martin arrived, driving my carrier himself. He said

that they had been shot up on the way through. Both the driver and little red-haired Chamberlain, my 18-set operator, were hit, and also a D.R. following behind. (Chamberlain's wound is a graze in the neck, so luckily he is not bad.) Beardwell was bringing his platoon up the street at the same time and was hit in the stomach. Murray Reekie came to report where A Company was. I told him to take care going back; but, when only twenty yards from my H.Q., he was hit in the shoulder. C.S.M. Muir was in a bomb crater and shouted, "Come down here, Sir," but poor Murray, distraught with pain, ran round in a circle instead. A burst of automatic fire caught him in the face and jaw and I fear he is pretty bad. One or two people were both gallant and aggressive in going for these snipers. David got two, and C.S.M. Muir another though not until he had received a nick in the neck, a bullet through his battledress blouse and a third bullet had hit his rifle. Meanwhile the Hun got a light mortar into position and we had yet a few more casualties, bringing them to five officers and forty-six O.R.s for a most ineffective day's work.

7th Armoured Division arrived on the scene about 3 p.m., sweeping over the ground with a mass of vehicles and men. It now began to rain hard and the ground soon became a bog. We were told we could withdraw to some buildings on the edge of the town, but this was cancelled when a German R/T message was intercepted to the effect that a counter-attack with tanks was being mounted. I now had to tell the Jocks that we were ordered to get ourselves firm where we stood, which meant that they were to dig themselves in, in the mud and rain. They took the disappointment very well.

So here we are, in some sort of defensive position, what is left of us. We have lost fifteen officers and about 150 other ranks since the break-through started on August 8th. Being under strength before we started, we are now very short-handed indeed. In fact, we have only one subaltern, Williams, left. The remnants of the four rifle companies are now amalgamated into one composite company. I have brought up the Pipe Band, the Pioneers and as many drivers and clerks as could be scraped together, under the M.T.O., to thicken us up. In spite of an excellent hot supper, cooked in rear and brought up in thermos

containers, which has put new life into all of us, I am feeling very low indeed over to-day's miserable failure, and it has been a real effort to force myself to scribble these notes.

August 24th.

Late last night a new draft of thirty, under a very young subaltern, Chappell, arrived. They are all as young as he is; I should think their average age is barely nineteen. I was able to find a place in the perimeter for them to hold. They were so keen that they "stood to" all night and managed to collar a few German deserters, which was an encouraging beginning.

We have moved a few miles out of Lisieux, and Harry is back in command, as the new Brigadier, Sinclair, a Gordon Highlander, has arrived. Battalion H.Q. is in a small chateau with some fine old panelling, though, like almost every house we have been in, it has been sadly looted by the Boche. No wonder the French are all so pleased to see us.

August 25th.

I ran back in my jeep to 88 General Hospital, near Caen, to get a new pair of spectacles. On the way there I crossed a plain where I counted twenty knocked-out German tanks. Coming back I had a look at the two cathedrals in Lisieux. One is very old and quite charming, and as it is down in the town it is a miracle that it has not been hit. The other was completed a few years ago and is the most monstrous thing I have ever seen, a hideous white affair that looks like a cross between an Indian temple and a sugar cake. Unfortunately it is well outside the town so did not have much chance to get bombed.

August 26th.

I am still awfully, awfully tired and feel bruised all over in spite of eleven hours' sleep on both the last two nights. I was hoping that we might be staying here a week but we advance again to-morrow. And we really need time to get things sorted out. We have had a good draft of men, but only two officers, which is what we need most. One of them arrived and told the Padre that he was glad to find himself with this battalion as

he had a friend here already, Donald. Poor Ewen had to tell him that he had just buried him. I have spent most of the day writing to next-of-kin. I found that Donald and Stewart both left widows, poor things. Oh, the sadness of it all, the sadness!

August 27th.

A proper day, for we have advanced over twenty miles behind the armour: through St. Georges and over the river to just short of Boisse. Rouen is on the same map-sheet. They say that fifty-six squadrons of medium bombers visited it yesterday, and that we are to by-pass to the north and go for St. Valery, where three-quarters of the Division had to capitulate in 1940. The Canadians have Dieppe to avenge, so it is also very suitable that they should be routed there. I fear we look like missing Le Touquet, but anyway St. Valery and Dieppe will be fun.

This morning we were ordered to be ready to leave at 7.30, but did not move off till eleven as the roads were so congested. We are stopping the night in the usual fields and orchards near a village called Appetôt, and as the armour is in front of us we have not had to be very tactical. There is a brewed-up Covenanter, blown up on a mine, just beyond Battalion H.Q. It is in an awful mess and judging by the contents all the crew were killed, certainly the driver and co-driver.

I wish we knew more of what was happening at the Seine crossings. I fear most of the Huns will have got across as we have seen very few prisoners coming back. I suppose this means a pretty stiff campaign to break into the fortress of Europe or whatever they call it. But I don't think I much mind what happens, so long as we first get a real good rest at the seaside.

August 28th.

We are now in a tiny hamlet called Burneville-sur-Seine, though unfortunately it is not quite on the river as the name would suggest. It is a pretty little place among small hills and woods. On our way up we heard that the other two battalions were having some trouble and there was a long wait at the roadside. I was somewhat reassured when no casualties came back, but we have just heard that each battalion has had about thirty.

Our area did not look too healthy, as quite a number of shells and mortar bombs had landed there. I went round gingering up the digging and stopped H.Q. getting their supper until every one had some cover. There is a charming little farmstead in "our" orchard, and the family have been giving the officers calvados, eggs, milk and butter, though they appear to be in a very small way of business. I always regret that we have to dig hundreds of slit-trenches on these people's land and rarely have time to fill them in, since they are usually needed until the last moment.

August 29th.

Moaning Minnie came down in the night, though fortunately it caused no casualties. But it set part of the hamlet alight and the R.A.P. had to turn A.R.P. and put it out. Twenty-two rabbits were killed, which the morning's rumour turned into twenty-two people; also two cows belonging to our new-found farmer friend.

The day started with some patrols, all of which reported that the Hun had gone during the night. I went out with one of them and came to a little gem of a chateau on the escarpment, from which I had a wonderful view of a loop in the Seine that looked a long way below us. The enemy had been living there and the house has been stripped bare; one could see that there had been some lovely things inside.

Harry came back from Brigade after lunch to say that 5-7th Gordons are held up at the village of Yville and we have rather a difficult operation to do: to pass through them and occupy some high ground about two miles beyond. We are going to do it as a night attack.

The Brigadier, Charles Napier the B.M., and Aldridge the G3, got shot up when they motored too far down into Yville trying to find the 5-7th. Apparently a policeman who had been sent out to put up a "Stop" notice got wounded. They were fired on at very short range by an anti-tank gun and the G3 was killed, though the other two and their drivers and signallers managed to scramble out into a ditch. The Hun is now in possession of the two jeeps and a wireless set.

At dusk we moved in T.C.V.s to a debusing area just outside Yville, five miles away. As usual, Harry was on ahead with his recce group, leaving me to bring up the Battalion. I went rather too fast for the trucks and was horrified to find that half of them had taken the wrong turning, so I had to send D.R.s to scour the countryside for the Battalion. Meanwhile I had some anxious moments at the bottom of a ditch when a couple of Moaning Minnie salvoes came down in what was to be the debusing area. My anxieties increased when the lorries arrived and we had an awful hold up at the cross-roads while they and some tanks and a 5-7th 15-cwt. all tried to go in different directions at the same time. As quickly as I could I got the men out and the companies dispersed, and told them to dig slits.

We left there at 11.20, H Hour being midnight. Harry was afraid we were going to be late and that our artillery concentrations would get too far ahead of us, so I stood at the roadside urging everybody to step out. Down the hill we went, down a long and rather ghostly avenue, under bright moonlight with clouds, the best light you can have for night work. On we went, advancing in column along the side of fields and down a track through the woods. We were following a succession of artillery concentrations on the copses and woods astride our axis, which were lifted to advance at a rate of 100 yards every two minutes; three times we checked for a little when we were too close, and finally reached our objective without any opposition.

August 30th.

We are among heather and pine-trees and in some respects it is an ideal position as we can see nothing, therefore nothing can see us, and we are in consequence unlikely to be shelled. Most people seem to like this type of ground but for my part it reminds me too much of my schooldays.

Twenty-odd deserters have surrendered to us to-day, but Poles, Mongolians, Jugo-slavs and an Eskimo or two, not a Hun amongst them.

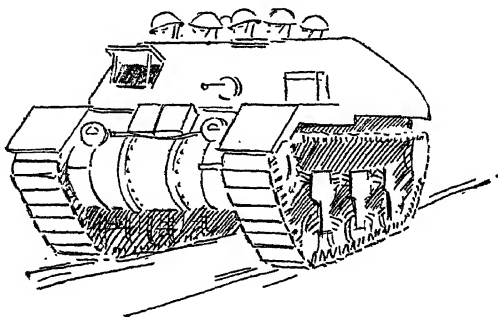
The Recce Regiment reported no enemy this side of the Seine, so I went off swanning for some eggs. I came to another nice chateau with a beautiful view of the river. They told me that

twenty Germans crossed in a boat this morning. How we do keep missing it, and how few Germans we seem to kill!

I ran on to the ferry site at Duclair and found a lot of abandoned German vehicles head to tail. There are about a hundred, and most kinds seem to be represented. Tanks, S.P. guns, stores and workshop trucks, armoured cars, and so on. The master race evidently fled across the river in an unpremeditated order of march. Our medium bombers caught them, but surprisingly few are burnt out. There were not many dead, though one saw a few gruesome sights. Soon there were quite a lot of us looking for anything which might be useful. I had brought Reid, the officers' mess cook, who does not often get a day out, and we got two cases of brandy, six bottles of red wine, a wireless set and an alarm clock.

This evening it has been raining hard and it is pretty miserable in a dug-out. We had supper in a large captured Boche truck, but the roof did not really keep the water out.

To-night's news was mainly of air-raids on Kiel and Bremen. We cannot understand why the R.A.F. is not sent all out to rout the retreating columns. We feel that all our bombers ought to be turned on to the German field army (though preferably not just in front of the Highland Division).



Kangaroo

September 1st.

TO-DAY I went to Rouen. We began by following the river, then came to some branches across the road. I thought of trying to move them, but remembered that eight of our sappers became casualties this morning in clearing a similar road-block which was booby-trapped. There is an encouraging amount of abandoned German transport on the road to Rouen, including several S.P.s which presumably ran out of petrol. All the Rouen bridges are blown except one. The outskirts of the town have been badly bombed, but the centre, with its famous cathedral, is untouched. I am glad that we do not seem able to hit cathedrals. Caen, Lisieux and now Rouen, all undamaged. Rouen is the largest and most inhabited town I have yet seen during the war. I found a bar with a bad type of Frenchman against it. He kept saying how much he liked the Germans, expecting a laugh each time. I only had an hour there as Harry had asked some guests to supper. On the way back I stopped at a cottage to collect some washing. The woman is very bitter as her son, taken by the Germans to work in Paris, had a throat infection and died of neglect.

September 2nd.

To-day we covered nearly our greatest distance in one day since the start of the campaign, and are now at Veules-les-Roses, on the coast between St. Valery-en-Caux and Dieppe.

Reveille was at 4 a.m. on our miserable heath, and we washed and shaved in darkness and the rain. It was still very black at 5.30 and we had a job to get out of the wood. At the first corner I saw a 87 sign (the Brigade number) pointing left, and down there I went with a large part of the column behind me. The B.M. afterwards said it was 57, not 87. I soon found myself behind the polar bear signs of 49th Division. Our subsequent adventures are not very interesting, and it was some hours before we caught up with the HD column, and even longer before we

joined the Battalion, just after crossing the Seine at Elbeuf. The Brigade had been told to concentrate round Pissy Po, but en route orders were received for the Division to go straight to the St. Valéry area, the Germans having withdrawn.

All along the route the population threw flowers at us, waved and gave the V sign, and whenever there was a halt we were offered refreshment. All the little boys came up and asked for cigarettes for papa. This countryside is completely untouched by war, which has moved too fast across here. We passed through a village called Limesay and I wondered whether it was from here that my ancestors the de Limesays (hence "Lindsay") came nine hundred years ago. If so I don't blame them, for it is a very dull little place. Incidentally I did not realise until to-day that you are still in Normandy a long way east of the Seine. Everybody was very elated at this dash forward, and the convoy went much faster than the regulation 15 m.p.h.

In Veules-les-Roses I found two Fife and Forfar Yeomanry officers, who said they embarked here in 1940. I walked a little way along the top of the cliff to inspect the Hun defences and was intrigued to find some shells tied up head downwards at the edge of the cliff, so that they would fall and explode on the beach below when the wire was cut. All the front is blocked and mined, so you cannot go down to the sea.

We heard that Commandos have liberated Dieppe, so I went there after tea. There were surprisingly few people, considering that it has been very little bombed, though of course it was much knocked about in the 1942 raid. The Casino on the front has been blown up, and I was told that this was because our men fought from behind it. I walked right through the hotel where Mother and I spent a week just before Munich. It had been a German H.Q., and in the principal room a sand model was laid out for a tactical exercise. The Canadians were thronging the streets; I can never forget that they are the only volunteer army in the world and was glad to have a chance to talk to one or two. I could not stay long in Dieppe as Harry had a discussion fixed for 9 p.m. It was about smartening ourselves up, saluting and better M.T. discipline. Rather an anti-climax after the rest of the day.

September 3rd.

Like no doubt millions of other people, I thought of that September 3rd five years ago, when I woke up this morning.

How vividly I can still remember that day!

We had kept a scrapbook in the Mess and it included an extract from Battalion Orders of August 4th, 1914, which read, "Officers will send their swords to be sharpened by the armourer-sergeant." Many of us had smiled at it in the intervening years. But now the hands of the clock had turned a full circle and the scrapbook had gone. With the regimental colours, our pictures and plate, it had been sent to store the week before. The orders now read, "All officers will draw battledress from the Quartermaster," and I for one was thankful that I should go into action in this very practical and inconspicuous uniform which we had seen the Militia wearing, and not, as in 1914, sword in hand.

For a week we had been hard at work mobilising. I was in the company store trying to differentiate between pouches web basic, pouches web supporting and pouches web compass for carrying, when somebody came in and said that the Prime Minister was speaking. The storeman slept there and had a wireless set. I turned it on to hear "... and I have to tell you that no such undertaking has been received. A state of war therefore exists..." A few minutes later the first air-raid warning sounded. As I put down the inventory and seized my steel helmet and respirator and ran to my post, I told myself that we should be doing this several times a day from now on. How, I wondered, would we ever get mobilised, how would anybody ever be ready for anything again?

But by September 3rd we had nearly finished. In the week we had almost completed the complicated change-over from a peace to a war footing. Ammunition, service bayonets, cooking utensils and field dressings had been issued. Ledgers and accounts were now closed down. Our respirators had been tested in the gas chamber, our weapons on the range. We had completed innumerable "returns" and compiled many long lists: of "those proceeding overseas" with the company; of those under nineteen who were to be relegated to Details and who, in military terminology, would also "proceed," but only to the band block on

"Zero plus seven"; of clothing and equipment, weapons and stores. We were medically examined, the men in line in the barrack room, the officers in the comparative privacy of the billiards room. "The army hasn't changed much during the three years that I have been out of it," I thought to myself as the Medical Officer listened to his stethoscope placed over my cigarette case.

We kept pace with the day's schedule and in addition solved several new problems which were not catered for in the "mob-scheme," such as where to dispose of property varying from the company typewriter to the regimental beagles. Those of us who had not been on active service before learned many new things during that week, such as that the second of the two identity discs is intended for one's grave!

There were many strange faces in the Mess on September 3rd, 1939. The reservists had arrived the night before, mostly former officers who had hurriedly left their businesses, farms and estates. We now numbered amongst us a brewer, a stockbroker, a haulage contractor, a remittance man, a Parliamentary candidate and several farmers, all with one thing in common—uniform that was now many inches too tight. The Chaplain was the busiest of us all, performing more marriages in a day than he ever did before in a month, since many men at that time were getting married on a capital of about a couple of pounds. The young doctor, in a brand-new uniform, was instructing the band in stretcher drill.

There was certainly no lack of keenness. Derek, just nineteen, was genuinely frantic when ordered to India, as he so wanted to become an Old Contemptible. Where is he now, I wonder? And nobody envied the Major (still with a piece of 1917 shrapnel in his spine) who had been sent away to command an internment camp. Everybody wanted to jump off in front at the start, for we did not then realise how long the race was to be. Buying kit assumed a certain urgency when, for all one knew to the contrary, one might be in action a week hence. So officers snatched an hour off here and there and dashed down to Princes Street, returning with queer-shaped parcels. Most had some fancy, perhaps for a shooting stick, a balaclava helmet or a patent shaving brush

which turned into a fountain pen. "Socks are the things," Ian kept saying. He went out as a reinforcement officer in May, 1940, with eighteen pairs, and was killed within twenty-four hours in the one in which he landed in France.

War brings incomparable misery to all classes, but can there be any doubt at all that far the greatest burden falls upon the devoted shoulders of the private soldier. I was very conscious of this then, as indeed I am to-day. I had just left a wife and three young children, but had the comfort of knowing that they were well provided for in things material. It is often not so with the men. As a company commander at that time, I listened to some pathetic stories from reservists who were called up at a moment's notice, leaving sick wives at home with nobody to look after them. Even when all was well, unlike the officers, they could not in most cases afford to send for their wives to share those last few days with them. In every disaster it is the poor who suffer most, for at the best of times the security margin is slight, and when things go wrong that margin simply disappears. At British Legion meetings I had heard ex-officers say that nothing is too good for the private soldier. Now I realised just how true this is. I realised also that, though the future seemed as if it could scarcely be more unpromising, I wished to be nowhere else than with those men of mine that day.

September 3rd, 1944, started with a memorial service for those of the Battalion who have fallen in the campaign. It was most moving, and especially when Harry read out the list of 133 officers and men who have been killed or died of wounds. The names seemed to go on for ever, and I feared that this long casualty list would come as a shock to the large new draft that arrived a few days ago. At the end the buglers blew the Last Post and Reveille most beautifully, and the Pipe-Major played the Lament. It was held in the courtyard of the principal hotel, and all the remaining standing room was taken up by the French. All through the service a little old *gamin*, very frail and wearing a sailor hat, sat on the steps of the terrace from which Ewen, with Harry at his side, took the service.

Harry and I called upon the Mayor, who is also the village

doctor. He was exceedingly moved as he gave us an account of how he tended three hundred British and French wounded on June 12th, 1940. Most of them belonged to the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, he said, and he produced a list of those that the village had buried. Every grave has one French family responsible for its upkeep. St. Valery also hid six British prisoners for eight months. They were smuggled away to Paris and beyond, but unfortunately one of them was caught in a train smash, from which he was taken to a German ambulance, and on his person was found the address of the woman in Veules-les-Roses who had hidden him. The Gestapo arrived and two women and the local barber were arrested. All three received the death sentence, though it was later commuted to life imprisonment; one woman died in prison, one was still there, and the barber, in ill-health, was released after three and a half years. The Mayor's two sons have both been prisoners since 1940. There is not one collaborator in the village, he told us, not one.

After lunch I ran over to Luneray, where I was once so unwillingly *en pension*. I found that old Pasteur Grenier died ten years ago, but his widow has remarried and is still there. The two girls have also married and one lost her husband in 1940. Mme. Grenier told me that the young *pasteur* who succeeded her husband was arrested for sending information to England by carrier pigeon, but escaped on the way to Germany when his train was *boulversé* by the R.A.F. She said that many flying bombs passed over Luneray and that a large number came down in the fields and in the Channel.

In the middle of the afternoon dancing started in the village square, and soon the place was crowded out by people of all ages from seven months to seventy. They said it was the first time that there has been dancing since 1940. It was stopped at five for Harry and the Mayor to make speeches. Harry said just the right thing: how pleased we were to be there and how grateful for the succour they had given our wounded four years ago, how brave they had been under our bombing, how much we admired De Gaulle's resistance movement and how, with their help, we were going to liberate the last metre of French soil and give the German his deserts. He has a very good delivery—acquired by

much practice in reading the Lessons I fancy—and it went down in a big way.

This was followed by Retreat, and of course the Pipes and Drums received a terrific ovation as they marched and counter-marched. In the middle of it an American tail-gunner turned up. He had been shot down in June, 1943, while returning to England from a raid, and had lain doggo in the same village ever since; somewhat unenterprising, but no doubt he had a good reason.

After this we had a big dinner party in the hotel, entertaining the Mayor and a few other local worthies. It was rather spoilt when the Brigadier whispered that we were going west to Le Havre, where 10,000 Germans are still resisting. It is not much fun to be going backwards when the big news is all of the drive forward into Belgium and Holland, and it looks as though we shall be out of the hunt for some time.

I remained depressingly sober for the rest of the evening.

September 4th.

This morning I had to preside over a Field General Court Martial at H.Q. 5th Black Watch, which was in another lovely chateau also largely ruined by the Germans. We tried two deserters whom we sentenced to five years and eighteen months, and reduced a C.Q.M.S. to sergeant for giving away army rations.

After a picnic lunch in the garden, I followed the Battalion through St. Valery, Fécamp and Etrétat to a small place called Villainville about ten miles east of Le Havre. On the way we passed a large notice-board which said, "Honour the Black Watch Regiment who fought here with courage in 1940," and I wondered that the Germans had not ordered it to be taken down. All this coastline is covered with minefields and fortified with sunken pillboxes for several miles inland, and nearly every field is obstructed with poles connected by wire and with a powerful charge on top of each. I could not but think how wise we had been to land where the defences were not nearly so formidable.

At Battalion H.Q. I heard that 49th Division have had a bad time trying to capture Le Havre from the south, so there is to be a pause while a big attack by the two divisions is mounted.

September 5th.

I went to the dentist to-day. Each Field Ambulance has one, to give first-aid for jaw injuries from wounds and ordinary treatment at other times. On the way back I called in at Fécamp and left Harry's spectacles to be mended, one branch being broken, as the French so delightfully put it. It is a small industrial town and port, more famous for its Benedictine than anything else. Etrétat, on the other hand, is a residential place and has a golf course, though I have no doubt it is now covered with mines like that of Dieppe. I trust that clearing up these minefields will be the first tasks for German prisoners after the war.

We had dinner to-night in the hotel at Criquetôt. Somebody said that Winston had once stayed there, so I optimistically took a towel and some soap, but of course it was not that sort of a place. The dining-room was reminiscent of the Naughty Nineties and reminded me of Rules in St. Martin's Lane.

Last night we heard that Russia had declared war on Bulgaria, and this morning that Bulgaria was asking for an armistice. It must be the shortest war on record.

A draft of seven officers and 150 men has arrived.

September 6th.

I have had a conference with the Northamptonshire Yeomanry, to try to get better communications for the next show. As a result I have got Harry fixed up with a Honey tank in which he will be able to have all three wireless sets: to his companies, to the tanks and back to Brigade.

The attack on Le Havre is set for September 9th and 10th.

September 7th.

The battle has been postponed twenty-four hours, which is all to the good as it allows longer time for preparation. I spent the day running an inter-platoon tactical competition. Unfortunately it rained all the time.

After supper I drafted the order of march for our advance. We are to have crocodiles, avres, tanks and flails. All very complicated; too complicated in fact, and I have been trying to persuade Harry to leave some of this menagerie behind as I fear they will get stuck in the woods we have to go through.

September 8th.

This morning I recced the ground for a rehearsal to-morrow.

I had tea with 5th Seaforths and found Richard Fleming living in a cottage which reminded us both of a stalker's bothy. From there I went to 2nd Seaforths and 5th Camerons, tying up small points connected with the operation.

The air-photos have arrived. The low-angle obliques in particular are excellent and one really can see the ground over which the advance is to take place.

Harry says 1st Gordons have a reputation for dash, so we can afford to take things carefully this time. I reminded him how he had hustled me when I was commanding the Battalion, and he replied: "Yes, and I have never regretted it more." He is such a good chap. He told the General that our abortive attack on Lisieux was his fault for trying to go too fast. Not many officers would have done that.

The Huns in our objective are said to be full of fight, and their commander a fanatic, as his wife and children were killed in Berlin. The Gloucesters in 49th Division have had 300 shells in their battalion area in the course of the day. Nevertheless we are on a far better wicket than the enemy. I wouldn't care to be in their shoes, being bombed and shelled every day and knowing that there is the hell of an attack to follow.

September 9th.

We were up very early for our rehearsal with the funnies. It has been raining for days, and the flails and avres got stuck in the mud, and the crocodiles did not do much better. It is going to be very difficult to control this zoo. I had a chat with Douglas Renny, who took over 5-7th Gordons after Blair-Imrie was killed. He says that when we get to Germany we are not going to live in the towns but in cantonments outside, like in India, in order to stop fraternisation. What a dismal prospect!

After tea we had an Order Group in the mess. The general idea is that 49th Division will take the high ground on the left, then 152 Brigade breach the minefield, through which we go. Our marching troops cross the forest beyond the minefield, then the armour follows up and supports us over the open ground

beyond. We shall have fifty-four vehicles and they are all being lined up to-night. I hope to goodness they mark the route well, and especially through the minefields, so that we cannot go wrong in the dark. Our column is being led by a sapper sergeant, Whitfield, in charge of a scissors bridge to put across the first anti-tank ditch. It seems a great responsibility to give to an N.C.O. One snag is that we are very short of artillery ammunition, having only about 200 rounds per gun. The wonder to me is that we have any at all, considering the length of our communications. Everything we possess has been landed on the beaches of Calvados and brought 200 miles by road.

I think the Battalion set-up is too complicated. For example, there are two alternative plans for the final assault on the heavy coastal batteries which are our objectives. I would have had only one, and would leave behind the crocodiles and lifebuoys. The latter are portable flame-throwers which were demonstrated for the first time to-day to the men who will have to carry them into battle to-morrow.

September 10th.

We are now in an assembly area, open fields somewhat congested by our guns and tanks, to say nothing of ourselves. After lunch I went to have a look from a gunner O.P. It was in a very Victorian house with rich mahogany fittings and a profusion of aspidistras and hydrangeas. I went up to the attic and stood on a table to look through the periscope sticking through a hole in the tiles. The F.O.O. was full of information of what was to be seen, but the panorama did not convey much to me.

I got back here and sat in the sun in my jeep, writing up this diary and watching the bombing of Le Havre's outer defences and also a leaflet raid; presumably the leaflets have been printed in red for it looked like some strange pink cloud descending. Two pathologists came up and talked to me. They want to take specimen organs of Germans killed by flame-throwers, as some have been found dead without a mark upon them—fear or carbon-monoxide poisoning? So I told them to follow HD 61 signs to-morrow and we would do our best to oblige.

We have borrowed a room in a small cottage to feed in. The

French are very good about this sort of thing, and a few tins of bully and packets of biscuits cannot be much compensation for the way we cut up the grass and dig slit-trenches everywhere. I have got all our vehicles marshalled and have arranged to join Hoare, the tank squadron commander, at 04.15 to-morrow. We are about to turn in for a somewhat short night (my shaving water is ordered for 2 a.m.), Harry in his caravan, Alec and David in the dug command post, Ewen, Bert and I on the floor in here.

September 11th.

A message came through from Brigade at 3 a.m., saying that we should start as soon as possible. Harry with his Tac H.Q. and the companies managed to leave at four, with a bit of a scramble. Then I walked over to the tanks and climbed into the Honey just behind Hoare's own Sherman. We set off by the artificial moonlight of the searchlights. The sky was clear so it was very cold, and I was glad of my greatcoat. The silhouette of these great black tanks, rumbling slowly westwards towards a glow low down on the horizon where something was on fire, the stars above and shoulders of mist at ground level, the indistinct shapes of beasts of the field and their tracks across the dew, together with the chat from the battle ahead that came through my earphones, all made a thrilling and romantic setting. Riding thus into battle, I felt an exhilaration such as I have seldom known before.

At the bottom of a valley we had to stop. From what I could hear, things were not going too well. Harry was complaining that the axis was blocked by vehicles of 2nd Seaforths. The B.M. told him to pass them with his marching companies. Harry asked why, if they were supposed to be ahead, then let them be ahead, he said; that way he would lose all control. There appeared to be a lot of confusion over the three gaps, Ale, Rum and Gin, through the minefield; two were by no means through and the third was blocked by three flails which had blown up on mines. Two scissors bridges which were supposed to be over the anti-tank ditch had fallen sideways, and the sappers were trying to put another across. There was quite a lot of shelling coming down.

Meanwhile we brewed up tea at the bottom of our valley and

watched the dawn turn into daylight. In a flash four hours had passed.

Eventually it was decided that the Battalion should go through Rum, and Harry and the companies went that way. The men got through all right but some of the few carriers they had with them blew up. As soon as we could, we moved up to close behind Rum, and there waited while the sappers did some more mine lifting. I heard over the air that B Company were doing well. They had captured the final objective of 5th Camerons and 150 prisoners as well. Soon they reported that they were on Pike, the code name for the edge of the forest, and had yet another 100 P.O.W. I gathered from this that the enemy were giving up rather easily, though several heavy stonks coming down in different places prevented any tendency towards complacency. Later I heard that there was quite a lot of opposition and it was not at all as easy as it sounded over the R/T, and that Chappell's platoon of nineteen-year-olds showed tremendous dash in this attack; as somebody remarked, they now only know the thrill of battle and have yet to learn the danger. B Company had three killed and fourteen wounded in this attack down the hill into the wood, our only casualties in the day.

We were ordered through Rum about noon, as soon as the anti-tank ditch had been filled in. We passed down a very narrow passage, marked with white tape, through the minefield, then down a steep slope and through a village at the bottom of the valley. It had been bombed flat, and later we heard that there were fifty French killed in what was hardly more than a hamlet. The bulldozers were doing good work clearing a way through it. I walked on foot at the head of the tanks, across a field and into a ride in the woods, where I found Harry, who had just come back from a recce at the far side. He said that all he had been able to see beyond was an A.A. gun with a white flag sticking out of the muzzle. He sent the companies down to their start-line at the forward edge of the wood, and the tanks down the ride after them.

Meanwhile a lot of prisoners were coming back, and it was most encouraging to see that they were being led by their officers. They lined up in front of me. "There you are," I said to the men

who were near me, "the Master Race. Help yourselves." They soon had a fine collection of watches, fountain pens, pocket knives, and not a few French francs. Then I put the prisoners on to improvising the track. Some of them had our pink leaflets on them. They seem very good propaganda to me. On one side was printed, "Why die in the last week of the war? You are between two Allied armies and the sea, and your holding out will help no one." On the back were set out briefly the terms of the 1929 Convention, stating that P.O.W. get seventy-five cents a day and can save it up to buy alcoholic liquor, and that they get papers, games, wireless sets, etc. But the main purport of it was to be a safe conduct, for in largest print of all, above the signatures of Eisenhower and Montgomery, it said: "This man is to be well treated and sent back from the front as soon as possible."

The companies crossed the start-line and their news on the R/T was all very reassuring. Soon we heard that there was no opposition and they were all on their objectives. So I went through with the M.M.G.s, anti-tank guns and mortars. The batteries we had taken were in very strong concrete emplacements with many deep underground rooms and passages. We have put our H.Q. mess in one of the gun-pits, just behind the gun itself, where there is much more light than down in the dungeons as well as the air being fresher. The whole place had been ransacked before I arrived, but I got three hurricane lamps for the mess. All the Jocks are smoking cigars and B Company has found a very nice little car.

We must have taken well over 500 prisoners in the day.

September 12th.

At 10.30 last night, just after I had got to sleep, orders arrived for us to clear up a large area this morning. We breakfasted at 6.30 (not too good) and started off an hour later, for what proved to be a most entertaining day. I was riding in a carrier behind A Company. Every wood and gun-pit we came to produced its quota of Germans, till eventually we had about 300, and there is not a Jock in the company without a nice wrist-watch, most of which had been looted from the French in the first place. It is the heavy bombing which has had such a demoralising effect

upon them. I have never seen such large craters; some of them are nearly 100 feet deep. They said that not many were killed, perhaps an average of two or three in each position out of fifty or seventy, but I suppose a direct hit sometimes causes a real holocaust. Anyway, it is this which made them give up so quietly. The R.A.F. has done a good job.

I found two Frenchwomen in one position, and they looked so pleased with themselves that I told them they would be handed over as collaborators and have their heads shaved. Whereupon one of them promptly went inside and produced six bottles of champagne. I said, "Thank you, but it won't make any difference." Later in the day we heard that 5-7th Gordons got fifty cases of bubbly in the Le Havre fort, lucky chaps. I still haven't any German field-glasses, which is my principal war aim.

September 13th.

Last night I ran into Le Havre, where a few snipers are still popping off odd shots in the port area. The back and centre of the town is undamaged but most of the port is bombed flat. All the restaurants and cafés are closed and I cannot help feeling that the French are rather wet; we should never have allowed bombing of one part of a town to have closed down all life in the rest of it. It has made us highly unpopular. We have had none of the rapturous welcome here that we have received elsewhere, and when Ewen made a few tentative enquiries about getting up an officers' dance he was told that the whole town is in mourning and they would have nothing to do with it.

Le Havre seems a poorish place with neither the cultural history of Caen and Lisieux nor the modern shops of Rouen.

On the way back I got lost in the dark among the bombed and shelled-out houses and blocked lanes, and was glad of the occasional bursts of fire from the port to give me my direction.

September 20th.

I have been rather idle in letting this diary go for a few days, but not a lot has happened in that time. We returned to Villainville a week ago and have been grounded, a sad blow. First they took our transport from us, to help get supplies up to the rest of

the army now mainly in Holland, and then most of our tins of petrol. This came as a surprise to us as we had just got posting orders for twelve new officers, the significance of which would normally be unmistakable. I greatly fear that the war in Germany may be over while we are back here and out of it. Having travelled so far since 1939 I would like to be in at the death.

We are now training hard: tactical schemes, field-firing exercises, competitions, route marches, and so on.

David and I went to Paris last week. Late the night before we started an order came putting Paris out of bounds, but Alec was decent about it and said that it was after office hours and he wouldn't officially open it until the morning. So we set off at 7 a.m., taking the officers' mess corporal, Robb, as well as my jeep driver, Akers. It was a lovely drive as soon as the sun came through the mist. Perhaps the most striking thing about the roads in France to-day is that every twenty yards along the verge of every main road there is a hole dug (with a small sheaf of straw on a stick beside it) to give cover from the R.A.F.

At Pontoise we found the bridge blown, and crossed by ferry. While waiting for it, the first of many English-speaking French women came up and said how pleased she was to see Scottish soldiers. She gave us some peaches. We asked about Paris and she said it was normal; she could not have given us better news.

We went on through St. Denis and the suburbs and down to the Rue des Capucines. Looking for a place to park the car, we saw a lot of jeeps and trucks outside the American Red Cross. We went inside and I asked the charming and sophisticated woman who was running it if we could make use of it, and leave the jeep in their car-park. Then a Mme. de Montague came up with her daughter and asked for news of some one in the Black Watch. David and I promptly asked them both to lunch. The said: "No, you must come and lunch with us at the flat, but have you any tins?" We thought this a bore, so insisted that they should lunch with us. It was a bad lunch at the Ritz—the stew was German army rations and not as good as our compo—but the martinis were excellent and it was all extremely cheap.

After lunch we went round the shops, almost the first we have seen as most of the others had been blitzed. To us it seemed

a wonderful and quite pre-war display. But I couldn't get any Tangee lipstick for Joyce. It was a lovely afternoon and we had a lovely time. Paris as usual seemed very gay, and we wondered if it had not been equally gay during the occupation. The restaurants were all going just as well as in London. We each had a luxury haircut, but spent most of the time just sauntering down the boulevards. Our kilts were a tremendous success, the first seen in Paris since 1940.

At five we assembled at the Red Cross and I was horrified to find that the jeep had disappeared. The American lovelies all thought it very funny. I went to the British H.Q. feeling that it was all rather tricky, with Paris out of bounds. However, the Lieut.-Colonel to whom I had to report is in the Blues with my brother-in-law. He said he felt rather uncomfortable about Paris being placed out of bounds, and I was able to assure him that nothing causes more ill-feeling than the present system whereby the fighting troops capture a town, then some rear H.Q. arrive, settle themselves in comfortably, and then place it out of bounds. Or so it seems to us, for Rouen, Le Havre and Paris are all in the same category. He fixed us up with passes to stay in the hotels that have been requisitioned, David and I in the Bedford in Rue de l'Acade, and Robb and Akers in the Metropolitan in Rue Cambon; he also told us of a truck going to the Division next day, and that it might first be worth while visiting the barracks where picked-up American vehicles are taken. The Americans lose ten jeeps a day in Paris, he said.

I had a somewhat gloomy evening in the Bedford, feeling very guilty about losing the jeep and over-staying the one day's leave which Harry had given me. The barracks was packed with American vehicles of all descriptions, but alas not our jeep. The HD truck had come to fetch two Argyll absentees, so we travelled back in suitable company.

September 23rd.

All the officers (except Harry, who has to set a good example) have now been to Paris or Rouen—in fact, I think all the officers in the Division—and all say they had a wonderful time, and none have been caught.

September 24th.

To-day I attended a board meeting of the electric light company in Fécamp, to try to get the electricity turned on. As the result of this several of us have had a hot bath, though the light is still rather temperamental.

The divisional artillery is now away assisting in the reduction of Boulogne, and 154 Brigade are investing Dunkirk.

September 24th.

We are certainly having a pleasant, idle time. There are lots of parties taking place. Last night we went to a very good dance given by Brigade H.Q. in Etrétat. Before it the B.M. said: "I think we should open the case of wine I got in Le Havre. I believe it is very good stuff. The name on the box is 'Encre.'"

To-night the General is coming to dinner.

September 25th.

Gertrude Lawrence has a concert party over here which played to 5-7th Gordons. Next day it was going on to 154 Brigade (two Black Watch and an Argyll battalion). Charles Irvine and Mike du Boulay thought it would be a great rag to make them sing "A Gordon for Me, which they assured the concert party was 154 Brigade's favourite tune, and they got them to rehearse it.

The words of it are:

"A Gordon for me,
A Gordon for me,
If you're nae a Gordon you're nae use to me,
The Black Watch are bra', the Argylls an' a',
But a cocky wee Gordon's the pride o' them a'."

Luckily the performance was cancelled, or there would have been the devil of a row.

The officers of 5-7th Gordons gave a supper after their concert, at which the following duologue was heard:

Mike: "Don't call me Major, Gertie."

G.L.: "Don't call me Gertie, Major."

September 28th.

This morning we started the long journey eastwards to catch up with the war.

After the others had gone I went round the company areas to see if they had been left clean and tidy, and was pressed to have a glass of cognac with several farm families who all seemed sorry to see the last of us. The Battalion has left a good name in this district, though earlier on a soldier was found with the back of his head bashed in. As this was on the main thoroughfare we put it down as a road accident, but there were no signs of a smash, so it would seem that he was murdered, probably for womanising.

I followed the convoy, taking my time. We passed a lot of abandoned German artillery and armour which presumably had run out of petrol. The country was like Cambridgeshire or the Borders: open rolling fields and small woods. I stopped for lunch at a cottage by a large house, exchanged greetings with the lady of the manor, and was given some fruit. All the people at the roadside waved to us. Battalion H.Q. was in the usual chateau with the usual countess, but here it was neither old nor picturesque, just a big red house. As I had to do the three stages in two days to get to the far end with a recce party ahead of the Battalion, I decided to go straight on. So, after a hasty meal, we drove on: four officers in two jeeps.

After dark we pulled up at the lodge of a large house. The massive gates were opened for us by a very old retainer. It was the Chateau de Saveuse, he said, and the owners the family de Hauteclouque. We drove into the courtyard and up to the front door, and asked if we might put up for the night. The Countess said that, except for her room and her daughter's, the whole house had been stripped bare by the Germans. She showed us the ground floor and every room was as empty as when the builders left it. They had brought huge vans, she said, and what they could not take out through the doors they removed through the windows: all the treasures of the family. While the lodge-keeper fetched water and wood for a fire, she took us into her room. She was very ashamed that except for some apples she could offer us nothing but plates to eat off. She told us that

General Beck had been taken prisoner in the house on August 29th, that he had turned her and her daughter out of the two rooms that had been left to them, and that he and his staff officer used the floor of the little recess that was ten feet from the dining-table as a latrine. She told us much about the atrocities committed by the Germans, and how essential it is that we be harsh to them this time if we do not want another war in a decade or two.

September 29th.

We were up at six and off at eight, and drove through many places with historic names: Amiens, Cambrai, Valenciennes, Mons. Several towns along the route of the retreating German armies had been bombed, and I doubted whether this policy had justified itself, for many humble houses seem to have been laid waste for probably no great gain.

We stopped to look at some of the 1914-18 war graves. The entrance is under a Lutyens-style archway, and the names are kept in a book in a small cupboard with a copper door in the porch, but the Germans have stolen the books. The stone crosses themselves are of a simple but beautiful design and each has the regimental crest on it, with the name, regiment and date beneath. Many of the graves were of unidentified remains, thus, "An Officer in the Wiltshire Regiment," or "A Sergeant in the Royal Artillery," or "An Australian soldier of the Great War." At the bottom of each of these crosses was inscribed: "Known unto God." Further on we came upon the memorial to the 9,000 killed in the Battle of Cambrai "*who have no known grave.*"

The war graves country is very open with long, straight avenues, all of young trees. In places one could see the earthworks of old trench systems near the road.

The Belgian frontier ran half-way down the main street, and immediately we were over the other side we had coffee pressed on us, a welcome change from the cider of yesterday and a very generous gesture in view of the shortage. Flags were festooned everywhere, and notices: "We thank you soldiers for our liberation." Portraits of the British Royal Family were much in evidence. One household was doing

its best with a picture of Edward VII, fished out of the attic, no doubt.

Except in Mons, we have seen no war damage in Belgium. Brussels is untouched. It is a lovely city with many buildings finer than those of London or Paris. The railings in front of the Royal Palace are garlanded with bouquets and bunches of flowers. Belgian flags and drapings in Belgian colours are everywhere.

I spent an hour looking for the Field Cashier and another in a queue before I could draw 1,000 francs. Then, after lunch at the Palace Hotel on army rations disguised, we set out along the tramway line to the R.V. at Haecht. On the way we passed two airfields from which the R.A.F. is going full blast. A squadron of medium bombers was just taking off, while some fighters cruised overhead awaiting permission to land.

The country north-east of Brussels is flat and Dutch-looking. At Haecht I could find nobody who could speak anything but Flemish. After waiting two and a half hours at the R.V., I left a message that I would be back at 11 a.m. next morning, then turned round and drove back to Brussels. After parking the jeep in the military police barracks (running no risks) I established a firm base at the Palace. Then I went out and joined up with an amusing young Belgian who is recovering from a wound received with the Maquis. His fiancée has dark-green eyes, pale red lips and hair like spilled honey. Together the three of us spent a most amusing evening.

September 30th.

The Battalion duly arrived this afternoon. H.Q. was just getting settled down in the Catholic Girls' School when orders arrived for us to move on again to-morrow.

We are to take over the St. Oedenrode sector of the line from 15th Scottish Division, guarding the left of the corridor that runs up to Nijmegen. Then as soon as the supply situation permits, we attack northwards and clear up to the Maas.

We have caught up with the war at last.

Part Two

HOLLAND

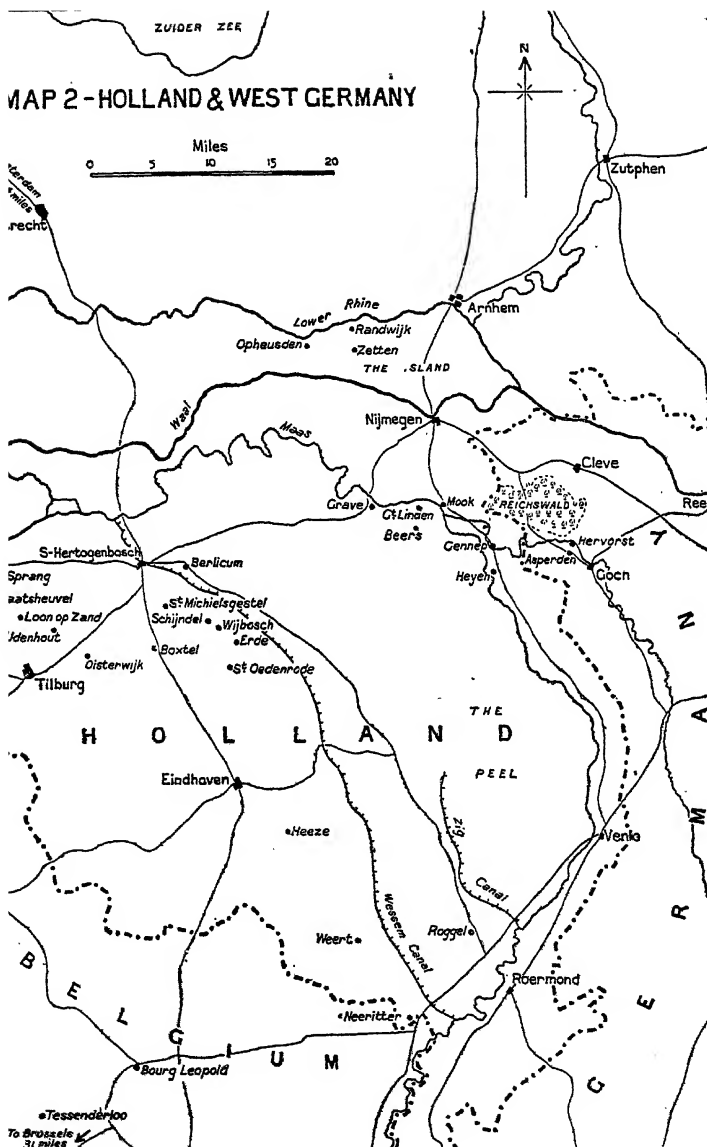
October 1st.

WE TOOK over from 10th H.L.I. this afternoon in what, they assured us, is a quiet part of the front.

Three airborne divisions were put down ahead of us a month ago to secure the four bridges: over the Rhine at Arnhem, the Waal at Nijmegen, and the Maas at Grave and Mook. All three divisions took their objectives. The follow-up formations succeeded in relieving the American divisions who had secured the Maas and the Waal crossings, but they did not manage to get through to the bridgehead of 1st Airborne Division on the far side of the Rhine at Arnhem. Now we are holding somewhat precariously a narrow corridor connecting our three river crossings, with the Huns on either side of us.

The take-over to-day went without a hitch, except for some gunners who drove down a lane into no-man's-land and blew up on an anti-tank mine; they were lucky to escape without serious casualties. We set fire to the jeep with three H.E. rounds from one of our anti-tank guns, to stop the enemy recovering it after dark. This is very flat, wooded country, and you can only see from one hedgerow to the next. The companies and platoons are, as far as possible, based on farm buildings. In Normandy, to avoid mortar and shellfire, one used to try to choose positions as far from isolated buildings as possible, but then it was summer. Nowadays we feel that the weather is the greater enemy of the two. The Dutch have nearly all cleared off but they come back daily to milk their cows. Battalion H.Q. is in one of these small farms. At one end is a barn in which we have the command post. Our signallers, drivers and mess staff live in the centre, from which all the animals have been evicted, and the family is still

MAP 2 - HOLLAND & WEST GERMANY



in the house at the far end. All these Dutch farms seem to be built on the one-storey house-byre-barn plan.

The Jocks don't seem to think much of the latest picture of Monty in a polo sweater, talking to the King and Queen. I heard similar criticism when he was photographed in the same dress while reading the Lesson at a Church Parade.

October 2nd.

The Huns in front seem very quiet and we can walk from one of our positions to another without being shot at, although the enemy is only 400 yards away at the front edge of the wood opposite. Lying about are a few dead pigs and cows, clean killed by shellfire; I am surprised that the H.L.I. did not eat them. There is an orchard with a bumper crop of delicious crimson apples; also the tail unit of a Typhoon. Our predecessors told us that most of the fuselage landed in the enemy lines and that the Huns have built a three-man dug-out beneath it. Harry is arranging a "bashing-party" for to-night, to beat up a position opposite. This is what is known as "dominating no-man's-land."

October 3rd.

When Harry suggested last night's operation I, too, thought that it was a good idea. Now I'm not so sure. At dusk we stropped up the front edge of that wood with our artillery and then sent a couple of platoons across under Clay, the second-in-command of D Company. The raiding party went through the near side of the wood like a pack of hounds and think they killed at least six enemy, though it was too dark to be sure. They brought back one prisoner, a pimply little rat-faced boy. But it cost us Clay, shot through the chest, though he is not going to die, and a couple more casualties who were caught in the D.F., and maybe we were lucky to have got off so lightly.

Our command post in the barn is beginning to be very comfortable. At first it was both dark and cold; but our Pioneers have taken a large slice out of the barn door and replaced it by talc which gives us more light, and we have carpeted it with two

feet of straw and rigged up tarpaulins to keep the draught out. The only snag is the habits of a cat which lives in the straw above our heads.

October 4th.

It may have been in retaliation for our offensive action of two nights ago, because last night we were raided. An enemy patrol pounced upon a forward section and carried off one man, leaving another badly wounded. Perhaps we were taking things too easily before; anyway this morning we have greatly strengthened the forward posts with wire and trip flares.

The Division has started a Rest Camp in Antwerp. Harry very sensibly offered to provide a major to run it, at a time when no other C.O. was willing to part with one. Bruce Rae, Bill MacMillan and Jim Robertson have been through every action since Alamein, except during brief absences recovering from wounds. This means that we shall be able to keep one of them out of battle in future.

Harry is ill with a brônchial cold and Bert has moved him to a house in St. Oedenrode, a couple of miles from here.

October 5th.

Every night since we have been here one or two German deserters have come over to us. It suggests that we have a very poor type of enemy opposite us; and that it is only a few bright boys who do the patrolling. They are always examined by our Austrian interpreter, Private Likvornik. He is a small, thin, meek lad with a family background of Nazi persecution, and it does us good to see him stand up, with his hands on his hips, and fairly put it across the prisoners that are brought in to our H.Q. This lot say that they are commanded by a Lieutenant Bauer, and that his dug-out is very far behind and at least three metres deep!

Harry, Alec Lumsden the Adjutant, David Martin the I.O., Bert Brown our doctor, Ewen Traill the padre, and I have now been together for three months, and a happier family would be hard to find anywhere. Harry is a unique character. I have never met a C.O. who is less feared yet so much respected and adored, nor one for whom people would go to such pains

to produce good results. Our little company has lately had three additions. One is a friend of Harry's: David Scott-Moncrieff. He has not done much soldiering, having been on the staff of a Polish H.Q. for three years, but is intelligent and will be an asset; at the moment he is understudying the I.O. His hobby is pictures and his post-war ambition is to document all the Gainsboroughs in the world. Another is John Frary, the Signal Officer, whom we call the Dormouse as he has a phenomenal capacity for sleep, in addition to a great sense of humour. The third is Jack Johnston, the mortar officer, who arrived with a draft six weeks ago and has been asked to join our mess because he is also a charming chap, though I tell him that it is because he is the only officer who possesses a Tilley lamp.

October 6th.

The corridor to the east has been counter-attacked, but it has been held.

It is pretty quiet here. We get about twenty shells or mortar bombs in the battalion area every day, but—touch wood—so far only two casualties. Sometimes a stray bullet comes through the roof of the command post and rustles at great speed through the straw above our heads.

I went to see Harry this morning. He is better, but not having much of a rest as the main street of St. Oedenrode is under harassing fire. In fact, a shell hit the next house just after Bert had taken his temperature. Bert said: "I think, Sir, if you don't mind, I'll now get back to the front line!" Harry is going away for a week's sick leave in a day or two.

October 7th.

There is already a noticeable difference in style between the battalion commanders. Bill Bradford has already made his name and I have little desire to make mine, so there is no great activity on the front of 5th Black Watch or 1st Gordons. On the other hand, Douglas Renny, commanding 5-7th Gordons, is full of energy and daily conducting operations to make life hell for the Germans opposite.

I have been developing a new technique. There is always the

possibility that the enemy may pull out during the night. The orthodox way to discover whether this has happened is by patrols at first light, with a big risk of casualties to the men sent out to reconnoitre. So for some days now I have feinted a dawn attack by putting down smoke or firing the artillery, mortars or M.M.G.s to draw enemy fire. So far he has always replied promptly, and I know that he is still there. David Martin is full of ingenuity in thinking out new ways of fooling them.

October 8th.

We tried a new stunt to-day. We have noticed that sometimes the Huns in the front line, when they think we are about to attack them, shoot off a red light signal to call down their defensive artillery fire. So this morning we evacuated our most forward platoons and David and I crept out as far as we dared, and then fired cartridge, signal, illuminating, red, one, into the air. This we knew would make the Huns man their guns to fire the D.F. Five field regiments and two medium—152 guns in all—then opened fire at every known enemy battery.

October 9th.

We have started a forward policy for leave. It will be ages before everybody gets a turn at the Antwerp Rest Camp, so I send off one officer and twelve O.R.s every day for thirty-six hours, and so far nobody has found any difficulty in arranging his own accommodation.

The Division has just lost one of its best-known characters, Mike du Boulay, second-in-command of 5-7th Gordons, who has been sent to lecture in America. He has been through every action with the Division since Alamein, and as he has a young wife with three children, I'm delighted he is now out of it. There are so many good men being killed every day that one has to brace oneself to read the daily Roll of Honour in *The Times*. Yesterday we saw Donald Howorth's name in it. He joined us with a draft soon after D-Day and proved to be the beau-ideal of a fighting platoon commander. In the Colombelles show he killed eight enemy with his own pistol, and when Bruce Rae told him that he was to withdraw his platoon, he replied: "Well, you

must take full responsibility." We had heard that he had returned to his own regiment, the Rifle Brigade, after getting over the wounds that he received on August 15th at Glatigny. Now he, too, has been killed.

October 10th.

It has rained hard for three days, which has made it miserable for the troops who are standing in trenches, most of which fill up with water very quickly. I have been hotting-up our dozen deserters who are awaiting trial or promulgation of sentences. Hitherto they have been living back in comparative comfort while their more honourable comrades have been manning the positions, an intolerable situation. So I have them marched up and put in one of the forward positions each night.

Yesterday we shot up an enemy patrol and killed three of them.

October 11th.

To-day we had "Exercise Honk." The object was to frighten the Huns more than usual, at no risk to ourselves, and take a lot of prisoners. So we shot them up good and proper with artillery, tanks and S.P. guns, and then Likvornik harangued them for a long time through a public-address equipment. But only one deserter came in! Perhaps the others were all so frightened by the preliminary bombardment that they went to the bottom of their funk-holes and could not then hear what was said.

Brussels has just been placed out of bounds and everybody is practically speechless with rage.

October 12th.

Before long the supply situation will be equal to another forward move, and then we shall clear the enemy right back to beyond the line of the Maas. To-day I went to a conference of all commanding officers, which the General held in a clearing in the woods where Divisional H.Q. is at present. He only went into the plan in very broad terms, principally with the object of finding out what assistance commanders would require in the way of Typhoons, crocodiles, avres, flails, etc., so that these could be applied for in good time.

October 13th.

More deserters came over last night. They all say that many more would do so if they dared, and that it is only thought for their families which stops them. The allowances to the wives of deserters are stopped and they have been told that they will not be allowed to return to Germany for twenty-five years.

October 14th.

To-day, for the first time, there was no reaction to our morning feint attack, so we had to jack up a patrol to see if the enemy were still there. It did not get very far before being fired at.

We have been sending two or three snipers out every day, and they usually return with pretty optimistic reports. Thus Sergeant R. claims to have drilled round holes through two square heads this evening; but unfortunately there can never be any confirmation.

October 15th.

Harry is back and looks much better. He is sending me to Corps H.Q. near Antwerp to-morrow, to obtain legal advice about a court martial case.

Incidentally he has got the D.S.O. for when he was commanding the Brigade, which is very good news.

October 17th.

I enjoyed seeing Antwerp yesterday, though it was rather an anti-climax after all the stories I had heard about it. Two of them have made us laugh. The first was of two officers who went round the town talking broad Scots and saying: "We speak vera leetle English"; this, they considered, put them in a better position to discuss the various attractions of Antwerp in public and to ignore the hotel notices about lady visitors in bedrooms. The second was of a young girl who gave an officer her photograph inscribed "*à Peter avec toute ma sympathie*," after her parents had declined to give her permission to sleep out!

Antwerp is a port and industrial town and might be said to compare with Brussels as Glasgow does to Edinburgh. There seems to be plenty of drink *au marché noir* (a small gin 75 francs,

or about eight shillings), but no food so all the restaurants are closed. But all those on leave were enjoying themselves wildly. I was disappointed to find that the golf links are in the front line, so had a haircut and bath and saw "Fanny by Gaslight," a very ordinary film from a very remarkable book. All the usual welfare organisations, such as N.A.A.F.I., Church Army, E.N.S.A. and Y.M.C.A., have reserved buildings and are evidently about to arrive to entertain the troops. By that time Antwerp will probably be out of bounds.

October 18th.

Most of the day was spent studying the maps and air-photos of Schijndel in preparation for our operation on the 23rd.

The plan is for 5-7th Gordons to attack and capture Wijbosch, a small village to the east of it, the night before. 5th Black Watch will then pass through at first light and capture the south-east end of Schijndel, including a large factory which would appear to dominate most of the town. Then we attack from the south-west and take the rest of it. There is a very big building in our objective marked "Klooster," which we take to be the same as "Cloister," or in other words a monastery or nunnery. Bruce's theory is that it may with luck turn out to be a girls' finishing school.

October 19th.

At the beginning of this campaign we used to "stand-to" at 4 a.m. each morning. Now we do so from 5 a.m., so the season is advancing. The leaves have nearly all fallen from the trees (which makes camouflage much more difficult), and the fields are already in that sodden state which we must expect for the next six months. A month ago Harry was told by the General that the Higher Command expects us to be bogged-down for the whole winter. Yet now we are about to attack. A great deal will depend upon how the tanks manage to get over the ground. If they can compete with the mud and if this next operation is a success, I see no reason why the coming winter should stop us.

To-day we handed over to our old friends, 10th H.L.I., and moved to a concentration area behind Erde. We are in the usual

flat country in which one can never see more than two fields ahead. However, the whole Battalion is under cover, in farms, barns and outhouses. This is a typical bit of the old, catholic, South Holland countryside: clogs, grannies in the traditional white lace head-dress, barges on canals, windmills. The beds in the small farms are all bunks let into the wall, and the chief ornaments are Madonnas and other coloured saints under glass cases. Although the principal living-room always opens directly into the cow byre, each house is scrupulously polished and clean.

There is a nice bitch in this house, of the Dutch barge-dog breed. Dick, our interpreter, said: "She is going to have kittens." Harry said: "How very peculiar!" He breeds these dogs at home and has promised to return and buy one of this litter.

October 21st.

More consultations about the operation. It should be fairly simple, but you can never tell. Colombelles and Lisieux looked easy enough until the shooting started. And other attacks, which had every appearance of being thoroughly sticky parties, went very well.

We are putting the Typhoons on to that klooster. It is a key building, so it would seem as if the enemy is bound to defend it.

October 22nd.

Harry gave out his final orders this morning. It is odd to think that we have not fought an action since we captured Le Havre on September 11th, nearly six weeks ago. I have almost forgotten what it is like to feel frightened.

This afternoon I went for a solitary walk along the canal bank. It reminded me of another afternoon ten years ago, on another Dutch canal many miles to the north: the ice crackling and bending beneath our skates, Joyce in a saucy little fur cap, her cheeks pink with excitement, a great bowl of yellow tulips in our bedroom. What is she doing at this moment?

October 23rd.

An interesting and amusing day: we advanced three miles, occupied our objective and then at least one company took part

in an impromptu dance! But there was no battle as by the we got there the Huns had all pulled out.

5-7th Gordons started at midnight. It was to be a s_____ attack. We stood outside in front of our farmhouse for half an hour, listening for the non-existent sounds of battle. Douglas Renny had plenty of artillery at call and it was a good sign that he appeared not to need it. Just as I was climbing into my bunk in the wall, David came in to say that there was a lot of spandau fire from farther to the left. This morning we heard that this must have been when two companies of 5th Camerons were caught crossing the railway embankment, silhouetted against Monty's moonlight behind them. They had nearly fifty casualties from this M.G. fire, including, I believe, as many as ten officers. David Scott-Moncrieff was acting as liaison officer with this Brigade and had a very lucky escape; he missed a mine going down a lane in his carrier and another carrier behind him blew up on it, killing the driver and co-driver.

We started off soon after 8 a.m. After being held up once or twice by formations in front of us, we found there was nothing to stop us moving straight ahead into Schijndel. The klooster turned out to be part monastery, part nunnery. It had been knocked about by shellfire and all the glass was broken; fortunately the Typhoons were grounded by bad weather yesterday. I was surprised at the warmth of our welcome, considering what a lot of damage had been done to the town. Afterwards we heard that the Huns had systematically looted every room in the town before withdrawing.

A few small groups of paraboyos came out of the houses and gave themselves up; we got twenty-seven in all. We heard that 7th Armoured Division were a long way in front, so consolidated our positions rather half-heartedly. Later some dozen solid shot came whizzing down the line of the main street, overs from a tank battle ahead of us. Meanwhile the Black Watch behind us discovered that the big factory in their area makes silk stockings.

We have installed our command post in the Father Superior's small house in front of the klooster. The walls are covered with oil paintings, and the fat and jovial abbot slaps his stomach in

front of each as he says: "Yes, I make him." But they made David Scott-Moncrieff wince. It gave the abbot great pleasure to show us his wireless set hidden under one of the floor-boards. He had made him too, he chuckled.

October 24th.

This afternoon Harry sent me forward to recce a concentration area for the Battalion in the St. Michiels Gestel area. Dark thunderclouds were banked up on the skyline, so I decided to try another klooster marked on my map. It only took a moment to see that there was accommodation for a brigade, let alone a battalion, in this huge place, part of which has already been taken over for a Casualty Clearing Station for the armour. I sent D.R. back to give Harry the O.K. and went round the building. There was a wing for each company, and most of the men would have beds; judging by the number of bars and billiards tables the Hun had used it as some kind of rest centre.

I walked across the lawns and up a lane, to be stopped by some men of our Recce Regiment. "Spandaus ahead," they said. This surprised me as it was only three hundred yards from the main road along which I could at that moment see a convoy of three-ton R.A.S.C. lorries.

The Battalion arrived. I reported our location to Brigade, and code over the air. "But have you turned the Germans out?" I came back the startled voice of the B.M. There seemed to be some confusion of thought.

We found a lovely mess-room, with fruit and flowers on the table. As we sat down to supper somebody remarked that there was none of the usual Bosche kit lying about, so it had obviously been a planned withdrawal, and wasn't this just the very room in which to place a time-bomb?

Then in strode a squadron-leader of the Recce Regiment. He proceeded to point out that there was only his very attenuated squadron between us and some fairly hostile enemy no more than half a mile away. When Harry replied he would warn our company to be ready to turn out at short notice, the officer rather dryly pointed out that what he was interested in was having men on the ground *just there*—a nicotine-stained finger pointed to the

map. Harry said that we had a battle to fight on the morrow and he wasn't prepared to do more; later he compromised by ordering a recce of defence positions, by opening up the company R/T sets, and by making everybody sleep with their boots on.

October 25th.

After a quiet night I was sent off early, with my usual recce party of company representatives, to find a battalion concentration area north of Boxtel, which was the Brigade objective.

While driving down the road I wondered whether the Duke of Wellington's Regiment still have Boxtel on their Colours. It may have been replaced by some more illustrious battle honour, yet this little-known action in an obscure Dutch town is as richly associated with the traditions of the British Army as Waterloo or Mons, for it was here that the first Thomas Atkins gained his immortal renown.

It was almost one hundred and fifty years ago, in September, 1794, that the 33rd Foot under Arthur Wellesley repelled a savage French attack at Boxtel. Thomas Atkins, a soldier of twenty years' service and the right-hand man of the Grenadier Company, lay with a bayonet wound in his chest and a bullet in his lungs, his course almost run. Wellesley moved to the side of the dying soldier who, seeing the grief on his young colonel's face, gasped out: "It's all right, Sir. It's all in the day's work."

Half a century later the aged Duke of Wellington stood on the ramparts of Walmer Castle with an officer who had come down from Whitehall with papers for the signature of the Commander-in-Chief, among which was the pro forma of a new document relating to soldiers' pay which, as a matter of courtesy, was to be referred to the Duke with the request for a name typical of the common soldier to be inserted as the specimen signature. Could His Grace suggest a name?

The Duke moved forward to the ramparts and stood for some time in silence gazing out to sea. Perhaps those dimming eyes looked back across the blood-drenched slopes of Waterloo, the broken mountains of the Pyrenees, the ragged sierras of Spain, the olive groves and cork woods of Portugal, and the torrid plains of India; but it was on none of these that his memory

lingered. After a long pause, he turned to his interlocutor and replied: "Private Thomas Atkins." His mind had gone back, as the minds of old soldiers often do, to the early days of his campaigning, to Bortel; where Private Atkins himself has now returned, once more to conclude "the trivial business of dying" and win anew his immortality.¹

It did not take long to choose company areas, based on some very nice houses from which the Hun had hurriedly withdrawn during the night. Soon after the Battalion arrived we received word that 5-7th Gordons had entered Bortel without opposition, and later "no move to-day." We had chosen a charming modern house for the command post, and Harry immediately gave orders for the bath water to be heated.

On our way there we had passed what looked like a golf course, which Bert and I now proceeded to investigate. There followed one of the most comic games that can ever have been played. Incidentally I wonder when golf has taken place so close to the front line as, all the time we were playing, shells or mortar bombs were crashing down less than half a mile away. There were only four holes, the others being in a minefield, and we had only three clubs between us, as the Germans, the sods, had stolen all the rest. There was a brigade H.Q. set up a hundred yards from the first tee, and as I teed up my ball I wondered what the penalty was for hitting a brigadier. The fairway of the second was bordered by the tanks of 7th Armoured Division, and the crews all stood on them and kept up a running commentary of criticism or advice. The third tee we shared with a charging engine. A full colonel (medical) came out of a tent, looking very pompous and displeased, and proceeded to stand in the middle of the fairway. I suppose he thought we were not taking the war seriously. "By Jove! it does me good to see golf again," said a young yeomanry half-colonel (as the Americans would say), striding by in his jodhpurs. "Very well, then I'll call you at my court-martial," I replied, before drawing breath to yell: "Fore!" at the Assistant-Director of Medical Services.² But just in front

¹ Source: Army Training Memorandum, No. 51.

² This page in my diary is largely illegible. My memory suggests that it was C.R.A.S.C. or C.R.E.M.E., and not the A.D.M.S.

of the fourth green the Divisional General was holding a conference of all his commanders, and this was too much even for us.

We returned to our H.Q. to find David Martin and David Scott-Moncrieff planning a fishing trip—"a 36 grenade is not big enough"—and Harry about to leave the house with a gun under his arm, when up drove the Brigade Major with orders for us to move off in an hour's time, preparatory to carrying out a night attack.

October 26th.

Harry and I rushed off to Brigade H.Q. in the hell of a hurry, to get the orders. It was to be a night operation to drive the Huns out of some woods so that the armour could go through into open country next day; tanks do not like woods until they have been cleared, as it is so easy for enterprising infantry to shoot them up from close range with bazookas. Harry then went off with his company commanders, to recce the start-point for the attack, which was on ground held by 7th Black Watch, while I brought the Battalion forward.

The plan was for the companies to take successive objectives in the woods, in the order: B, A, D, C. Harry chose a small two-room cottage on the axis for his Tac H.Q., from which he could send each company forward when its time came.

All went well for a while. B Company, under Ronald Davies, silently filed past. "Noo then, nae indiscriminet shootin'. Mind thur watches and foun ten pens," I heard an N.C.O. shout, and gave him full marks for trying to relieve the tension of those men walking into battle. But the copse they had been given as their objective proved to be unoccupied. Then, as previously arranged, there was a thirty-minutes' fire programme upon the objectives of the other companies. This had the effect of bringing down the enemy D.F., and, as I half-expected, it was upon the area of the level-crossing 400 yards ahead. I pointed this out to Jim Robertson, who was commanding A, the next company to go, and suggested that he should avoid it. He said he must go straight down the road and over the level-crossing, or he would get lost. I told him that this was rot, that he should use his compass and cut across the fields and join the road beyond it. We

stood there in the doorway of the cottage, watching the search-lights, smelling the dew-drenched honeysuckle and clematis, and arguing half-heartedly for the five or ten minutes that remained. Then, with a loud shout of "Come on you lucky lads," Jim led off his company—straight down the road. I remained there and felt very miserable when I heard the stuff crashing down soon afterwards, but fortunately the Hun seemed to have lifted his D.F. a trifle, and it all landed behind A Company and away to a flank.

We heard no small-arms fire from A, so, in due course, Harry started off D, and later C. For a time there was no news as the wireless was screened by the trees, but a series of coloured-light success signals had been arranged and the Signal Officer was following the companies with a line party. Between the lights and the line we soon got the information that B, A and D Companies had reached their objectives without opposition. We could not hear any firing from C, and Harry and I agreed that it looked to be a walk-over. "We can do with bags of attacks like this," I heard one of the signallers say.

Soon afterwards a jeep came back with Heath, a subaltern in B Company, wounded by a shell splinter in the thigh. The medical orderly said it was one of our own that had dropped short. All seemed quiet in front, so I accompanied him back to the R.A.P., a mile away on the main road.

When I returned to the command post half an hour later I found Harry looking rather disturbed. Jim had telephoned from A Company to say that he could hear a lot of firing from the direction of C, and that there was a rumour that Bruce Rae, the Company Commander, had been killed. Then a jeep arrived from C Company with another subaltern, Gray, shot in the foot, and several more wounded. Gray said that they had been attacked simultaneously by two parties of enemy, each about thirty strong. He had no news of Bruce. The next event was the arrival of a corporal and eight men from C Company. They said there was confusion in front and they thought that somebody had shouted: "Back to the command post to reorganise." Then Jim rang up to say that Bruce had been shot through the head and was on his way back on a stretcher. In a few minutes the jeep arrived, but of course he was unconscious. Sergeant Honor, a platoon com-

mander, wounded in the shoulder, was with him. He was very plucky but could not give us much information. By this time a lot more of C Company were to be found in the ditch outside Battalion H.Q.

Harry and I then went into a huddle. I offered to take command of C Company, but he said he would send for Alec Lumsden. Two days ago it had been arranged for Alec to take over this company and Bruce was to have gone to D. So now I spoke to Alec on the wireless and told him to come up.

But we had still not captured C Company's objective, which from the map appeared to be a large country house with extensive stables and outhouses and the equivalent of a home farm. I said:

"For God's sake, let's wait till daylight and then attack with some tanks."

Harry agreed.

October 27th.

So at dawn to-day we gave the place the hell of a plastering with the artillery and 4.2 mortars, and then C and A Companies, supported by six tanks, attacked. It was a great success and they took it without any further casualties. Over sixty Huns surrendered, nearly half of whom were wounded, which was very satisfactory.

We have moved Battalion H.Q. forward to the house. Unfortunately, it has been badly knocked about by our shelling. The owner and his wife are still living there and, as one would expect, are very sad about the damage, but have taken it well. "This is the price of liberty," the Baron said, "but it is worth it." The house has many old English sporting prints and some good heads of chamois and red deer. There is a gaping hole through the drawing-room wall and through the sixteenth century tapestry that hangs there. Like every good Dutchman, he had kept a few bottles hidden away from the Huns, and over one of them he suggested that we might like to arrange a pheasant shoot in the park, as if we had not done enough shooting already. We all tactfully refrained from asking for news of his sister—Frau Von Ribbentrop!

Last night's casualties were six killed and seven wounded,

including three officers. Amongst the dead is my first servant, Graham; we parted company for our mutual good a month ago, after which he went to Bruce Rae. We are all very sad about Bruce, though Bert says that he has a fifty-fifty chance of pulling through. He was shot twice in the chest and also in the jaw, and his life was saved by the stretcher-bearers who got him back. He is such an attractive chap: gay, handsome and brave—he nearly always led his company himself, and rarely deigned to take cover. This is the third time that he has been wounded since El Alamein. Last night he could still speak when they got him back to his Company H.Q. He gave out some orders and his last words before collapsing from loss of blood were: "Don't forget, whatever happens, C Company must take their objective."

October 28th.

This morning we moved to Oisterwijk, and as nobody knew how long we should be there we began to make ourselves very comfortable in a leather factory. The managerial offices are most sumptuous and we were just settling down to champagne and cigars with the directors, and about to initiate tactful enquiries as to the prospects of a bath, when orders arrived for us to move on. We were to go to a forward assembly area beyond Udenhout and attack Loon-op-Zand by night.

As usual, I went on ahead to choose the area. There were not many buildings, so it was mainly a case of allotting each company a field, where in due course they had tea. As soon as it began to get dark the first two companies, followed by Harry and a small Tac H.Q., led off. Then I heard that a scout-car had blown up on a mine on the road ahead, although three tanks and several carriers had got safely through. So I ordered our Pioneers to clear it. Unfortunately Ayres, the Pioneer officer, was sent home on a month's course yesterday, and Sergeant Campbell went to Antwerp with the last leave party. The next thing I heard was that the pioneers had blown up their 15-cwt. truck, so I asked Brigade for some sappers. In due course Sergeant Urquhart arrived with a section, and they soon taped a safe lane through the mines. Meanwhile I could hear a good deal of shell-fire in the distance and took a compass bearing to the sound.

Plotted on the map it showed me that it was Loon-op-Zand that was receiving attention, and I felt restless and concerned on Harry's behalf. It was a consolation to know that the enemy could hardly be holding the town if he were shelling it now, so we were likely to be spared street fighting in the dark. Soon a message arrived from Harry for me to bring everything on.

I jeoped on ahead of the column, which consisted of the anti-tank guns, mortar carriers, a dozen 15-cwts. with the more essential stores and ammunition, and the R.A.P. Standing in the middle of the main street was Harry: a slightly-stooping, un-military figure, wearing spectacles with a near-white frame above an old-fashioned fair moustache, a tam o' shanter and a short gaberdine coat with a black sheepskin collar: the unique, inimitable Harry. He was in very good form, partly because we had got into Loon-op-Zand with only two casualties, and partly because he had knocked at the door of a house to ask a question, to find seven perfectly good German soldiers inside who surrendered to him. There had been no shelling for half an hour, he told me. The companies were now digging-in in their respective areas. They were in close contact, he said, and this I confirmed when I visited them, for there was a lot of sniping going on and spandaus were firing from not far off.

Soon after we got settled down, 5th Black Watch arrived. They are to push on from here before first light. We are only about four miles from the Maas, and I imagine that the Huns will be streaming back across it all night.

October 29th.

I wrote up yesterday's events while duty officer from 2 a.m. to 3 a.m. this morning. Then I woke David Martin and got into bed. For some time I could not sleep as I felt uneasy. The small-arms fire had died down, suggesting that the enemy had withdrawn, but there was a recrudescence of shelling. In particular, an S.P. gun was firing in our direction. We could hear the distant poop, followed almost instantly by the whizz-crash as the shell arrived and exploded not far away. We were in a council school, the usual one-storey affair with acres of glass. David said it was stupid of me to sleep under the window, and I replied that if a

shell landed just outside I would probably be better off there than in the centre of the room, since right under the wall I was at least sheltered from ricochets.

After a little I dozed off, to be woken up by one or two particularly loud crashes. Some glass fell on my bed and I told David that he was quite right. He walked across the room to wake up John Frary, who was next on the duty roster. At that moment there was an even louder crash and a shower of plaster came down from the ceiling. I saw David stagger and fall, saying: "I've been hit." John and I pulled him, practically unconscious, on to his safari bed, which made a good stretcher, but he was heavy to lift. Both the others in the room, John Inglis, the Battery Commander, and Waters of the Intelligence Section, were sitting down, very green about the face and obviously wounded.

The R.A.P. was in a doctor's surgery only 100 yards down the street and we soon got David inside. There was a hole about the size of a five-shilling piece high up in his buttocks; he had been bending over to wake up John when the splinters came through the ceiling. We hurried back to help the other casualties out; there were half a dozen more in the room next door. John Inglis had a piece in the chest, but Bert says it has not pierced the lung, and Waters is not too bad. The command post, when one had time to look at it, was indescribable: plaster on top of everything, blood all over the floor, and John and I as white from head to foot as a couple of millers.

That one shell has destroyed for all time my faith in a house, at any rate one without a good solid floor overhead. In that school the ceiling consisted of an inch or two of lathes and plaster under a tile roof. Harry blames himself for having chosen such a place for the H.Q., but it was already dark and he had been told to leave the best building for Brigade. Now we have moved into the klooster across the road, turning all the nuns into two rooms and leaving Brigade to find their own home. Every few minutes one of the nuns waddles past this table towards a cupboard, saying: "Good-bye" as she does so, which many Dutch seem to think is the same as "good-day."

After breakfast we got orders to move on. Just as we were

about to leave the town another signal arrived, saying: "Stop where you are. New plan. Friends coming through." The latest news is that 5-7th Gordons are to take Kaatsheuvel to-day and we are to go through them to-morrow, to Sprang, which is practically on the banks of the Maas.

Unfortunately we have had over twenty casualties here, thirteen from the direct hit on the school and eight or nine from mortar fire, mostly in C Company. Bert says he fears that a high proportion of them will be fatal as they were nearly all serious cases, including several stomach wounds.

October 30th.

Harry and I and the company commanders all went up the church tower at Kaatsheuvel first thing this morning, to study the ground leading to Sprang. It was a fine day and the land looked very fresh and green and peaceful. So it did not surprise us when some Dutch boys arrived on bicycles to say that the enemy pulled out of Sprang about midnight. We climbed into our vehicles and motored in. Chalked on a wall in the main street was: "We will come back, Tomy."

Harry gave me permission to take his carrier for a run down to the Maas. In the next village we met an octogenarian who said that there were twenty Huns in a café on the river bank. He was certain that they wished to surrender and offered to come as guide, so to the delight of the assembled crowd the old man was allowed to climb up inside. Going round the next corner, we almost knocked down a German soldier coming out of a public urinal; he, too, was put on board. Hastings, the signaller, asked him if he had lost his ferry ticket.

We set off down the mile of straight road leading to the river. The tracks of the carrier seemed to be making a terrible noise on the cobblestones. There was no cover whatever and I feared there might still be some Huns on the dyke in front. We had to go slowly so as to be able to watch for mines. I felt naked and heartily wished we had not started out on so foolish a trip, but we got to the end of the road and under the high bank in safety. There was a canal just this side of the dyke with the bridge across it blown, and beyond it the café, quite obviously

empty. But one girder, about six inches wide, still spanned the canal, and after much hesitation I crossed by it, followed by Hastings and the driver. The old Dutchman was left in the carrier, guarding the prisoner with my pistol. I also left the Bren-gun behind for fear of dropping it into the water.

We crawled up behind a pile of logs, and through my glasses I began to study the far bank, eight hundred yards away. Suddenly Hastings tugged at my sleeve. I looked down and there, to my astonishment, were twenty fat Huns just starting to row clumsily across in a great, heavy boat. It was the target of a lifetime. I shouted: "Get the Bren." I think we showed ourselves in our excitement, for there was at once a stream of bullets overhead. There must have been at least ten spandaus firing at us, for it was just like being in the butts during a L.M.G. classification practice.

After some minutes the firing slackened and then stopped altogether. I was just about to begin crossing back again, when there was a zoom and a bang as a small H.E. shell hit the far end of the bridge fifty yards from me. I nipped back pretty quickly and into a funk-hole. In the next quarter of an hour about twenty more shells landed all round us. Three hit the café behind and two a small cottage close to the carrier; one hit the middle of the bridge and the rest landed among the rushes on the canal bank. I thought: "This is frightful; they must have seen me trying to cross; Harry will get so worried, for we shall have to wait here until darkness, and then we'll get shot up by our own people." However, after half an hour we crossed over, on our hands and knees, and got back somewhat late for lunch.

Bert has had word from the C.C.S., who say that David is going along well, and Bruce was strong enough to be flown from Eindhoven to Brussels, which is also excellent news. Bruce was the last remaining of the twenty rifle company officers who came out with the Battalion on D-Day. That is what is so superlatively gallant about these chaps. They go into battle time after time, knowing perfectly well that they are dicing against the mathematical odds, which indeed they sometimes jocularly observe. For an officer to go into a dozen actions without being killed or badly wounded is like a coin coming down heads six times

running. He knows that his luck cannot possibly last, yet he would die of shame were some one else to take his place.

October 31st.

Last night we captured a prisoner with a truly remarkable letter¹ upon his person.

Here is a translation:

State Office for Increase of Birth Rate,
Berlin.

Dear Sir,

As many men have died during the war, it is the responsibility of the living to care for the women and girls, in order to have a steady rising birth rate.

You are thought to be very fit and we kindly ask you to accept this honourable German duty. Because of this your wife will not have a right to divorce you but must take it as a necessary consequence of war.

You are detailed to the 12th District (of Berlin) comprising nine women and seventeen girls. Should you feel unfit for this task, you have to send the name of a good substitute (*eines tüchtigen Ersatzmannes*), together with a certificate of incapacity signed by three doctors.

Should you be able to take over another district too, you become a Breeding Officer and also receive a breeding remuneration; you receive, too, the birth medal, 1st class, with red ribbon. You are also exempted from all taxes and have the right to a pension.

We will soon send you a list of the persons to be visited by you. You should start your fruitful work at once and report the results to this office after nine months.

With German greetings,
Personnel Branch of the War Ministry,
I. A.

¹ Lest the reader thinks that this is a leg-pull, in perhaps rather doubtful taste, I would add that I copied the original German version into my diary, and still have it.

We are going to 'S-Hertogenbosch later to-day. This move is due to another sharp counter-attack south-east of Eindhoven. All we have heard is that it came in against 7th American Armoured Division, who were very thin on the ground, and that it gained three miles in the first day. 15th Scottish Division and the Guards Armoured have been used to stop it. It is only eight miles from Second Army H.Q., where there has no doubt been a boom in the price of tin hats.

We have moved and are now installed in—what do you think?—another klooster! The amount of money these people have invested in kloosters is fantastic, and I must say I rather resent it. The Dutch certainly have a very high standard of living, at our expense. In two wars have we saved their freedom, and not least by spending money on armaments while they have invested in kloosters, schools and houses. As a nation they are individually industrious but politically lazy. I only hope they will face up to their responsibilities after the war, and take their full share of garrisoning Germany and Japan instead of leaving it all to us.

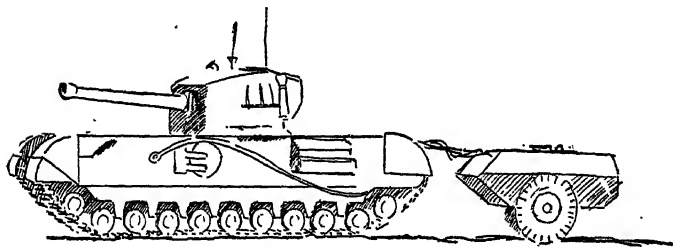
We took over here from a Welsh battalion and they are a dirty crowd; all their tins are lying about unburied and the latrines are choked, though it is not fair to blame their new C.O., who has been in the chair only thirty-six hours.

'S-Hertogenbosch means "duke's wood," with the apostrophe in front; "bois du duc" is still printed on some maps. It is certainly an attractive old fortress town, which I believe played a big part in the history of the Middle Ages. The moat round one side of it is still visible. For that matter there is also a big sheet of flood-water round the rest of it, and I do not see the Germans doing much good here unless they bring up their navy. The town was held by a S.S. unit until recently and has been badly shelled.

There is a metalled road, raised high up on a dyke with water on each side of it, leading out of the town to the north-west. B Company are in the Wilhelmina Barracks astride it. I visited them, and was glad to see the S.S. murals glorifying bloody war have been much spoilt by our predecessors' fire programme. B Company has a platoon post 500 yards up the road, commanded

by Chappell, aged nineteen. I always feel very sorry for youngsters, whether they be officers or N.C.O.s, when they are stuck out on their own, a standing temptation for an enemy identification raid such as was brought off here against the Welsh last night. So I trotted up the road to see that his dispositions were as good as could be. In the foremost trench, the nearest man to the enemy was young Akers, aged eighteen, his shiny round boyish face as cheerful as usual. With darkness coming on, I felt very sorry for him and horribly responsible. A fortnight ago he became the driver of my new jeep and promptly smashed it up. This I did not mind. But when he rang up to report it I told him that he was to mount guard over it until I could get a breakdown vehicle sent along. After three-quarters of an hour he walked into Battalion H.Q., though it is only fair to say that he acted under the influence of an older man. He had deliberately disobeyed a direct order, and I sacked him on the spot.

On my way back a team of mallard flew across in the gloaming. I looked at my watch—5.45—though I knew jolly well that I shall not have time to return there to flight them to-morrow.



Crocodile

November 1st.

I WAS UP with Chappell before first light, to find that his platoon had had a quiet and uneventful night. But the company had been ordered to send out a patrol some hours before, and Corporal Taylor, M.M. and bar, had been put in charge of two men for the purpose. They were shot up and Taylor is missing. If I were C.O. I would break the company commander for choosing him. He cannot have thought at all: sending out an N.C.O. who had done so much already when there are half a dozen others in the company who could well have profited by the experience.

We spent the afternoon trying to catch up with administrative jobs, which have been somewhat shelved since we left the woods near St. Oedenrode on October 19th. When Alec took over C Company David Martin became Adjutant, and when he was wounded forty-eight hours later Harry appointed Jack Johnston, who is now trying to get to grips with things. David Scott-Moncrieff has become Intelligence Officer. Harry is busy writing citations. We are very fed up that our ration is only one decoration for the last three months on the "periodical" list, i.e., for steady bravery and good work rather than specific acts of gallantry. There are at least a dozen N.C.O.s and men who more than deserve the Military Medal.

November 2nd and 3rd.

The law of averages has claimed its own at last!

I have been wounded, though only very slightly, and am now in No. 23 Casualty Clearing Station.

It happened in this way. The night before last the Brigadier gave us the rough outline of a plan to clean up the enemy north-west of 'S-Hertogenbosch. Yesterday I was sent to recce a concentration area in some woods, but before choosing one I had to be sure that there was a good track forward for vehicles. I noticed that there were sandbags on the floor of the jeep on my side, but none on the driver's. I asked Macdonald why this was so, and he replied that he had taken them out to clean the car. "You

drivers always have a good excuse for having no sandbags, but one day you may well be sorry," I growled at him splenetically.

The Derbyshire Yeomanry had been through all these woods. We started to drive down a ride and I told Macdonald to stick to the tracks of the armoured cars. A few minutes later there was a blinding yellow flash with a deafening bang, and I found myself sitting on my bottom in the middle of the sandy track, a jeep's length behind. I was still clutching my map. I glanced quickly at my feet and was glad to see that they were both still there. I shouted: "Are you all right?" and was relieved when Macdonald answered: "Yes," after a whimper or two. I got slowly on to my legs and hobbled over to the jeep, to satisfy myself that no limb was missing, though he had obviously broken something as he was in pain and could not move. The whole of the front of the jeep was wrecked. In half an hour it would be dark, and I was now terrified of being benighted in the woods. In my dazed condition it seemed as if life itself depended upon getting 500 yards to a main cross-track. I felt sick and there was a horrid acrid smell of the powder exploding charge in my nostrils, ears and hair. But worst of all was the stiffness in my legs; my trousers were torn and bloodstained and I felt as if somebody had slashed me across the shins with a crowbar.

When I came in sight of the corner I saw a jeep and shouted. Roddy Sinclair, the Brigadier, was in it, and never have I been more pleased to see anybody. At that moment some Derbyshire Yeomanry arrived, and we sent them down the track to rescue Macdonald. By the time we reached the klooster my legs had stiffened up considerably and I had to be carried down the steps to the R.A.P. in the cellar. I was annoyed to find that I have a few small punctures in the front of each shin, a few inches below the knee.

The drive in the ambulance seemed to last a long time, and when I was carried out on the stretcher I was astonished to find that I had progressed no further than the Brigade Casualty Clearing Point, only a few hundred yards away. Four doctors looked at my legs and the verdict was: "a fortnight, unless the bone is chipped." I submitted with good will to an anti-tetanus

injection and five M. and B. tablets, but made an awful fuss when they insisted on taking off my boots. I had heard some dreadful stories about wounded being robbed and I was wearing my best pair; finally we compromised by having them tied to the stretcher.

Back in the ambulance I fell a prey to gloom. The chances of bits of metal going into my shin without chipping the bone seemed remote, and I pictured myself being away for weeks and somebody else taking my place in 1st Gordons. Again we stopped and once again I was carried out into a room. This time it was the Divisional Advance Dressing Station. Two doctors satisfied themselves that I was in fit condition to stand the strain, and on we went again.

This time it was a longer trip. I noticed how bad the springing was, and thought how painful it must be for the seriously wounded. I wondered why we are so prodigal with some types of expenditure, yet so skimpy with others. A "victor" target is every gun within range and costs God knows what each time, and quite rightly when it comes to a fire programme no commander ever thinks about the taxpayer's money. Yet the Army tries to save by making us use wick lamps instead of Tilleys or Aladdins, and by rotten, cheap springing in ambulances.

After about an hour we reached the C.C.S. outside Eindhoven. For the third time I was carried out of the ambulance and inside a school, and once again an orderly brought me a mug of hot, sweet tea as I lay there on my stretcher on the floor. At the A.D.S. they had told me that David Martin was here and going on well, and immediately I asked the duty N.C.O. after him. "He died on the 31st," was the reply I got. I simply could not grasp this and continued to ask futile questions. I saw the sergeant making obvious efforts to be patient. He clearly thought I was not quite normal, suffering from shock perhaps. It was an awful blow to me. Later on I spoke to the surgeon. David had a large piece of metal taken out of him and did well for two days, when he had a relapse necessitating another operation, which he had not the strength to survive. Dear, beloved David! How we shall miss you!

I think this sort of tragedy is liable to shake one's nerve far more than personal experiences or near misses.

I did not get much sleep last night as, though I had no pain at all, my legs were very uncomfortable in any position. To-day's news is good. The X-rays have shown only a very slight chip in one shin. But there is a lot of fluid in my right knee which will take a few days to go down. It is not surprising, since I was catapulted out of the jeep by the force against the sandbags below my feet, so there must have been a considerable strain on the knee joints. I am more worried as to whether I have cracked my eardrum as I had sharp earache when I got some water into it washing this morning. I have not said a word about this to any one.

Macdonald was flown to England yesterday. He has two bones broken in one foot. He amused the orderlies by swearing that never again will he drive a car without sandbags. It was lucky that the mine was under my wheel and not his, or he would certainly have been killed.

I am the only battle casualty in this ward. It is a converted class-room and the other occupants are eleven soldiers, with pneumonia, bronchitis, bladder trouble, rash, food poisoning, and one Sten-gun face accident (a suppurating wound and a beastly sight). There is one nurse, a young, pretty and flirtatious but capable brunette, and two orderlies, both excellent fellows.

November 4th.

To-day I'm feeling bilious and miserable. I never can relax on those damned bedpans. It takes me all my time not to roll off.

The Division attacks to-night. I hope to God all goes well with 1st Gordons.

November 5th.

As I feared, a lot of casualties from the Highland Division were brought in during the night. The door would open, there would be a shuffle of feet, and a bundle tied up like a cocoon and reeking of chloroform would be carried in on a stretcher and put on a bed. I thought most of them were dying by the fearful groans they made, but several whom I had given up came to life

and in due course sat up in bed. Most of them were Seaforths and all agreed that the attack had been a great success; enemy small-arms fire was negligible, they said, and the only trouble was long-range shelling and mortaring. By 10 a.m. they were all away, the lightly wounded being flown to Brussels and the more serious cases direct to the United Kingdom.

I am very impressed by the two doctors who are looking after me. Indeed I have heard nothing but praise of the medical services in this campaign. They told me this afternoon that more than half the wounds they treat in this C.C.S. are from mortar fragmentation, and that the next highest proportion is mine injuries. This morning we had a sapper brought in who had been blown up on a mine. He had lost a foot and four fingers, has an arm broken and chest and shoulder injuries and is blind, poor chap.

November 6th.

My scratches are healing up well and I have gone on to dry dressings. Wilson, the Australian surgeon, has agreed to my going back to-morrow, though he says I must rest my knee while there is still fluid in it. I had a long chat with him this evening. After talking about Burma we came to the conclusion that this campaign is cushy, and that most people do not appreciate how lucky they are: a quick mail and newspaper service, speedy evacuation to the United Kingdom if wounded, a good climate, friendly inhabitants, even fresh fruit and vegetables!

Harry has just been in to see me, full of good cheer and good news of the Battalion's part in the operation.

November 7th.

I found I could not walk a step this morning and had to be carried to the car, consumed with anxiety that we should meet Wilson on the way and that he would send me straight back to bed.

We are now in a nice country house outside 'S-Hertogenbosch. It is delightful to be back again with Harry and Co. and to hear all the news.

November 8th.

We have moved to Heeze, seven miles south-east of Eindhoven.

I gather that the next operation is to clear up eastwards to the Maas, and as this will bring us almost to the German frontier, opposition is expected to be considerable. We have found a nice house for the command post. The owner, Mr. Evers, has a factory which makes ribbons, embroidered badges and "galloons"—whatever they may be.

Our host is most interesting about the invasion and occupation of Holland. He told us that it was mainly treachery and the Fifth Column which defeated them. Before the war Germany offered 25,000 domestics who were gladly accepted, many of whom were spies, he said. Holland was full of German technicians; he had seven and sacked them all in 1937, which led to trouble with his Government. The Army was rotten to the core. Men were made to take commissions for no other reason than that they had a secondary school education; troops were considered trained after six weeks. They were inefficient and so badly paid that corruption was rife. It was the duty of one high-ranking officer to flood the Peel—the low country west of the Maas—when the invasion of Holland started. He came back to Heeze and said that it had been done and that no German could pass.

"Then why are your boots so clean?" said Mr. Evers. "Make a record of it, Mr. Burgomaster. I charge this officer with failing to do his duty."

Next day he went to fetch some wounded and found no difference in the Peel. None of Holland's famous water-line was flooded. Prince Bernhardt was shot at by an official in the Palace and wounded in the hand. There was treachery everywhere. The Dutch Navy, on the other hand, was excellent, and "never was there a day in Rotterdam during the occupation without ten or twenty Germans being killed."

November 9th.

The plot has begun to unfold. We are to do a daylight crossing of the Wessem Canal near Weert in about a week's time. It is to be made in assault boats, each battalion with two companies up. 5-7th Gordons and two battalions of 152 Brigade are doing the

same thing further to the left, so eight companies will be crossing at the same time. H Hour is 4.30 p.m., though I would have preferred it to have been after dark. A good deal of shelling and mortaring is expected. A German warrant officer who has deserted says that 394 Assault Gun Regiment with twenty-seven S.P. guns has just arrived in the area.

I had a bath to-day, and my legs dressed. I am still very lame, hobbling about on two sticks. Nor do I feel very well.

November 10th.

We are making great friends with this charming Dutch family. There are ten children, and families of this size are not at all uncommon in Holland.

Evers continues to be a great source of interest. To-day he was telling us about the bombing of Phillips, the great Eindhoven firm which makes wireless equipment and much else. Mosquitos attacked it most accurately on December 6th, 1942, and very little harm was done to the rest of the town. A week later he himself was lunching in a restaurant at the next table to a Luftwaffe commission which had been sent to inspect the damage. He heard a senior German officer say: "A masterpiece of bombing! You pilots can learn a lot from it." Like the Comtesse de Hauteclouque, with whom we stopped for our last night on French soil, he told us how much the American stratosphere bombing is dreaded: how the Fortresses came time after time and hit Amsterdam instead of its airfield, "then the R.A.F. bombed it so good that it did not have to be bombed no more." In fact, they much prefer to be bombed by the R.A.F!

November 11th.

To-day we had a rehearsal of the canal crossing.

The plan is for tanks and crocodiles to dominate the far bank while the two leading companies advance with the flat-bottomed, collapsible assault boats on the top of bren-carriers. They stop short of the canal and the boats are taken off and "built," i.e., pulled out to their full size and the wooden props bolted in. Then each boat is carried forward and launched by the ten men who cross in it. The first crossing is made by paddling, but after

that the boats should be pulled from one side to the other by rope. To-day's rehearsal went very well, as was to be expected with nobody shooting at us.

Eindhoven was bombed this afternoon! It is scarcely credible, though indeed it was only four quite small bombs. But the bombing of Second Army H.Q. a few nights ago was a more serious affair. We have heard that the Major-General, R.A., and all his staff were hit, and a Brigadier, R.A.S.C. Since then they have changed their address.

November 12th.

A nice restful day!

I spent part of it reading "Army Training Memoranda." There was some interesting stuff from a captured German document. Referring to Normandy this said: "The incredible mortar and artillery fire of the enemy is something new. The average weight of fire on the divisional sector is 4,000 shells and 5,000 mortar bombs per day. This is multiplied many times before an attack, however small. For instance, on one occasion the British made an attack on a front of only two companies, yet they fired off 3,500 rounds in two hours." But the same article was not so complimentary about our infantry: "The enemy's infantry are not fighters in our sense of the term and consequently only a few M.G.s are necessary to hold them."

Nowadays most training instructions are about mines, which appear to be becoming an increasingly important weapon. Almost every day there is a note about some new mine, either metal, wooden or plastic, or some new variation in the method of laying them. The latest one is the schu-mine, a small wooden box about six inches by three inches, the lid of which is slightly raised when it is set. Being so small, it is easy to place under dead leaves or a piece of turf, and its effect is usually to blow off the foot of the person who treads on it. We are inclined to think that this little beast may be more bother to us than all the others put together.

November 13th.

The operation is scheduled for to-morrow, but we are wondering whether it will be postponed as it has rained hard for two days and the ground is very boggy.

As the last canal crossing operation was so successful, everybody is very confident about this next show.

My knee is improving, but I am not yet well. I seem to get headaches and feel tired and below par, which is a bore with a battle coming off.

November 14th.

It is nearly midnight and I am writing this in a tiny concrete cellar under a small farmhouse with several holes in the walls.

Everything has gone pretty well, except that we have unfortunately had about fifty casualties, including three officers wounded: Chappell, Barbrooke and Wood; a high proportion considering that the enemy did not stop to fight and the only opposition came from long-range mortars.

We left Heeze at 10.30 p.m. for an assembly area south of Weert: just a few farmhouses round which the companies clustered. I watched headquarters draw their dinners: three slabs of bully, hot potatoes and peas, hot prunes and custard, and tea, all cooked at Heeze and brought up in thermos containers. Harry and I established a small Tac H.Q. in a farm: in a stone floor kitchen, with the usual sour smell of urine coming through from the cows and sows in the room next door. There was some hectic last-minute planning to do, while the Dutch family ate or stood about, taking it all as a matter of course.

Just before H Hour I went outside and watched the companies moving forward. Each man was as usual very heavily loaded, carrying arms, ammunition, small pack and pick or shovel. They are always very quiet and solemn when going into action: intense, approaching the grim. Those are the real heroes of war, I thought to myself as they filed past me, the men who actually go right up to the enemy position and through the doorway, they and the officers who lead them. At one time in the last war the average life of a platoon commander was ten days. Here it is about a month. There is not very much difference.

At H Hour the guns all round us opened up. I stood there for a time to see if I could hear anything coming back, but our artillery was making too much noise. Then the buffaloes, those great big black amphibious carriers containing our jeeps and anti-tank guns, churned past us on their way down to the water.

After a little I went forward to where I am now. There I was told that the two leading companies were already over, and Harry, the Battery Commander and the I.O., with their wireless sets in handcarts, were about to cross behind the two reserve companies.

Then the wounded began to come back. I found that they were all in B and C Companies, i.e., from the right-hand crossing; they said that two large mortar bombs had landed amongst them, when they were rather bunched up carrying the boats forward.

Meanwhile the two brothers Morrison, who were trying to launch a raft on which some anti-tank guns and jeeps could be towed across, and the buffaloes of 11 R.T.R., were in trouble owing to the steepness of the canal bank. I got them a bulldozer from the sappers, but this did not appear to make much difference. The buffalo boys made every effort and had a number of casualties from mortar fire while out on foot trying to find a better place to cross; but in the end, with one buffalo swimming up and down unable to get out on either bank, the attempt was given up. So now we are waiting until the sappers have built the Class 9 pontoon bridge, before starting to get vehicles over.

It is very crowded in this little cellar, the occupants of which are the adjutant, George Morrison, the battery captain, a medium artillery representative, three signallers, my servant, the R.S.M., and two Jocks whose precise duties are unknown. Also two Dutchmen and a girl of about seventeen; one of the Jocks is asleep with his head in her lap. There are a few mattresses and some sacks down here, and with a small oil stove we are very comfortable.

All the companies of the four battalions have reported being on their objectives, though our A Company say that they are under fire from Craven. (The jargon code names for this operation are hunts, thus 1st Gordons Tac H.Q. is now at Grafton and the companies are at Blazers, Garth, Fernie and Quorn, while our

two crossing places are North Berkeley and South Berkeley. Who is the fox-hunter at Brigade H.Q.?)

I have just overheard Bill Bradford on the wireless asking for a victor target on Craven, after which he is going to send a company of 5th Black Watch to occupy it.

There was a lot of talk this morning about the Hun having pulled out, as he was not seen by our patrols early to-day. I am glad this was not so as a few spandau boys are preferable to the legacy of mines and booby-traps which he would certainly have left us had he gone back.

November 15th.

The sappers had the bridge built soon after midnight but we had to wait until 5th Black Watch and 5-7th Gordons had got their F Echelon vehicles over before it came to our turn.

I found Harry and Battalion H.Q. in a very cold and draughty farmhouse, all the glass of which had been blown out. After breakfast the General paid us a visit. He told us that 154 Brigade have had a fair number of casualties from mines, chiefly the new wooden schu-mine.

A letter from Joyce to-day. Within an hour of being wounded I had written to tell her how trifling it was. This was just as well, as the War Office telegram five days later referred to "... nine leg injuries." I am eagerly awaiting the letter which it said was to follow, as I am sure it will be a masterpiece.

November 16th.

Early this morning we pushed off in kangaroos and drove into Roggel without any trouble.

The church tower was blown down by the Germans before they withdrew last night, so that we could not use it as an observation post. We picked a modern house with a modern woman inside it for our H.Q., and thought "how nice this will be." But no sooner had we finished lunch than orders were received for us to occupy ground covering the Zig Canal four miles away. The only buildings in the whole area are what is prominently marked on the map as "California Farm." I implored Harry to keep away from this as it is such an obvious

target to shell; emphasis was given to this by somebody adding that the Brigade 4.2 mortar platoon had fifteen casualties last night from two direct hits upon the house they were occupying. So Harry said that he would put the minimum possible H.Q. in it, and the rest was to stay well back.

The companies moved out into positions between California and the canal and began to dig in. This brought down heavy shellfire, but it was so inaccurate that it only caused three casualties. A lot of enemy activity could be seen beyond the far bank.

Soon after dark a Liaison Officer arrived from Brigade to say that Division required us to cross the canal to-night, so that a bridge could be built for 154 Brigade to be pushed through to-morrow. We did not care for this idea at all, as the crossing was obviously well defended and by this time it was too dark for reconnaissance. Harry went off to Brigade bristling with objections, but by the time he got there they, too, had realised that it was not a good idea.

While he was away we heard that one of our subalterns, Charles Morley, was killed making a recce of the canal. Apparently there is a possible crossing place along the top of a lock gate. He was just about to go over when he was hit in many places by a spandau firing at him from twenty yards away across the water. His platoon, who thought the world of him, recovered his body after dark. He was a fine chap and always cheerful, an ex-London policeman with a huge jaw. His characteristic wave of the arm whenever he went into action will not be forgotten. Only yesterday Harry was saying how brave he was and that he hoped he would not go and get himself killed. He leaves a young wife and small son. Her pension will be £120 a year, a little more than £2 a week, at least that is what it was in 1939 and no doubt it has not since been greatly increased.

We are now reduced to only two officer rifle platoon commanders, instead of the twelve we should have. Of course, this speaks very highly for our subalterns, who become casualties because they are always at the forefront of the battle. And it speaks equally badly for the replacement system. This Battalion can do *anything* if it has officers, and nothing without them.

November 17th.

C Company was very shaken after yesterday's shelling, in spite of the fact that they only had three casualties. Alec Lumsden says they just sat in their slit-trenches and would not even eat. So Harry had a long talk to the Brigadier this morning about the shortage of officers.

152 Brigade are crossing on our left so we are putting down a fire programme in front of us, to create a diversion.

There has been a lot of enemy shelling a thousand yards away to our right. A sporting young girl came through it to tell us that there are twenty Germans in British uniforms in a village a mile away, and that they are rounding up all the Dutchmen. British or American uniforms? She was not certain, but khaki.

After lunch the Brigadier spoke to Harry on the telephone. He said that two companies of 5th Camerons had crossed on the left and were being fiercely counter-attacked. So, in order to create a diversion, we were required to make another crossing this evening. Harry said: "Oh, my God!" in a voice of despair. The Brigadier was very apologetic and Harry replied: "Well, you know my views. However, I will do my best." While the company commanders were being sent for, Harry and I had a real good grouse about our being rushed into an operation in this way. He remarked that our only previous failure, at Columbelles, was due to the same factors that would be operative this time: tired troops having to attack from out of slit-trenches.

The Brigadier (none of this was his fault) came round and tried to get Harry to fix the time of attack for 5 p.m., or even 7 p.m. Harry said "9 p.m. at the earliest," and I tried to support him by arguing that it could not be done before 11 p.m. Harry clinched the matter by saying that we had had five days to plan the last crossing, and now we barely had five hours, so H Hour was set for 9 p.m.

Though Harry was extremely anxious about the outcome of this operation, he behaved very calmly and sensibly. By 4.30 p.m. the company and supporting arms commanders had been given the broad outline of the plan and went off to recce the routes to the two crossing places before it was dark. Harry had had to

choose these from the map as there was no time for him to go and look at the ground. By this time it was raining hard. At 5.30 p.m. we all met again, in the kitchen of California House. The atmosphere was very cheerful as Harry gave out his orders, due to the jokes he made and the tone he set. The morale of the assembled officers, sitting on a few chairs but mostly on the floor, the window-sill and the kitchen stove, looking at their maps or taking notes, has never been higher. I was very impressed and so was Lieut.-Col. Eden. He is a gunner friend of Harry's and on a few days' leave. He used to teach assault river crossings at the Senior Officers' School, though he had never actually taken part in one. Now he was going to cross with the infantry, to see if his pre-war teaching had been correct: a sportsman, if ever there was one.

The conference broke up at 6.30 p.m., leaving two hours for sub-unit commanders to give out their orders, feed and prepare for action, in so far as this could be done in the open in pouring rain. Most company commanders brought their N.C.O.s back into California House and gave up all hope of briefing the men.

Bert walked round with the large earthenware jar and everybody got well rummed-up, the first time that I had seen this happen. They left in a state bordering upon hilarity. As soon as peace reigned in California, I checked through the timings of the fire plan which had been so hurriedly prepared and made a couple of corrections, lifting two phases of it five minutes earlier for the greater safety of our forward platoons. Then, once again, I stood in the doorway and tried to read the battle. I could see the tracer of our tanks on the canal bank and the jets of flame from the crocodiles. I could see a lot of shells bursting well this side of the water, clearly not the Government's. Later I heard that the bulk of the enemy fire came down in the gap between the two companies, since Harry had wisely chosen to cross on a front of eight hundred yards. A few shells, which landed closer, buried themselves so deep in soft mud before exploding that not much harm was done. Incredible as it is to relate, we only had two casualties. What amazing luck!

About twenty prisoners were marched back and I listened to Likvornik examining them. They said that their company had

twenty-two casualties from our shellfire this afternoon. They also said that their commander was Lieutenant Fockt. Somebody remarked that it was to be expected that he would be.

Soon we got the news that all the companies were on their objectives and the sappers began to build their bridges. This time we were not attempting to get supporting arms over until the bridges were up, as the canal was too narrow and the sides too steep to have any chance of getting buffaloes or rafts across. Theoretically the chief risk in these operations is that of being counter-attacked with armour before the anti-tank guns are in position. So medium artillery is always deployed against any such threat. These guns fire a 100-lb. shell and therefore have four times the destructive power of the 25-pounder, which itself is ineffective against tanks. Their officer told me to-night that near Caen his regiment brewed up two Tiger tanks and knocked over a third with their first salvo of the campaign.

November 18th.

We are all very relieved that last night's operation is so safely and successfully over.

I think we were all secretly dreading that there might be some sort of fiasco if there were casualties among officers, since each company now has only two instead of five. Actually the margin between success and failure was perhaps narrower than one might imagine, with tired troops and war-weary N.C.O.s who do not feel up to taking the responsibilities of officers. Of course, it is easy for a man to avoid taking part in an attack in the dark; he can say he fell asleep at a pause or that he lost his way. I talked to Ewen, who always of his own choice goes into battle with one of the companies. He said what a small degree there is between sticking it and breaking down, when going forward under fire: how it only needs one man to shout "This is murder, I'm getting out," and he takes half a dozen with him.

November 19th.

There has been a lot of shelling yesterday and to-day, mostly round the bridge area, but a couple have hit California House. One broke the fanlight over the front door and a few small

pieces went down the passage and into the kitchen, but without hitting any of the twenty people inside.

Harry told me to remain here to keep the route open. We have been having a terrible time from the mud, and nothing except kangaroos can be certain of getting through.

November 20th.

A lot of stuff has now gone through (to the left of us, for here we are in an impassable morass), and we have become more or less non-operational. But unfortunately there are no buildings into which we can move. I paid C Company a visit to-day. They had good deep sandy dug-outs, lined with straw, but they scarcely keep the rain out. As Alec said, it is miserable when you have to sit crouched under a ground-sheet and cannot even write a letter in comfort. Alec's personal dug-out looked particularly uninviting. I know him well. He is a member of the Stock Exchange and has no military ambitions whatever. When Harry offered him a company he only accepted because he felt that it was his duty to take a greater share of the risk and discomfort than that which falls to the lot of the adjutant.

November 21st.

We have now pushed the enemy back across the whole length of the Maas.

There is already talk of the Division moving, though as yet we do not know either where or with what objective. As far as one can see we are not, like Cæsar, going into winter quarters. The strategy of the Higher Command appears to be to drive right ahead, without a pause, and try to finish off the war. Bert's theory is that some good troops are wanted in the Reichswald, which from all accounts is an unpleasant place. I hope he will be proved wrong.

November 22nd.

We have just heard that the Division is moving in a couple of days to what is known as "the Island." It is, in fact, an island, between the Waal and the Lower Rhine, though we are only in possession of part of the eastern end of it, between Nijmegen

and Arnhem. It is too flooded for any major activity, so should be a pretty quiet area.

How we should have got on without the kangaroos I cannot imagine. They have brought up all our supplies since we arrived here. Our house is continually visited by people who say they are stuck in the mud, and stuck they remain until the next kangaroo passes that way and gives them a tow out.

November 23rd.

Harry was sent for by the General this morning and returned with the startling news that he has been appointed Commander of 44 Infantry Brigade, in 15th Scottish Division. Further, the General has made a strong application for me to be promoted C.O. in his place. I do not think he will succeed in this, as the same signal that promoted Harry designated one Grant-Peterkin, Camerons, to take his place. They say that he is a superman to whom Army want to give a few months' experience of commanding a battalion (he's had a reconnaissance regiment for nearly two years) before he goes on to command a brigade.

Everybody is terribly sorry that Harry is leaving, and I am very sad that our happy little family at Battalion H.Q. is being broken up. Anyway, it means that he is no longer so likely to become a casualty. During battle, when I have been back at rear H.Q. and Harry up with the companies, I have dreaded that a voice would come on the air on a forward set and say, "The Colonel has been hit."

November 24th.

Our faithful kangaroos arrived early and we piled all our kit into them. Behind them we tied the few jeeps we still had forward. We were very glad when that sea of mud was left safely behind us, though the day's move was to be no more than two miles.

I was busy arranging a farewell dinner for Harry when word came for me to meet the Brigadier at Zetten before dark, with a view to spending the night with the American battalion whose sector 1st Gordons are to take over to-morrow. My blown-up jeep has not yet been replaced so I had to take another, and before

we had driven ten miles a big-end went. From then onwards it was a question of hopping lifts. Two R.E.M.E. officers took me to Eindhoven, where I was picked up by a civil affairs major who put me down at 'S-Hertogenbosch, then a Canadian ambulance took me to Nijmegen, by which time it was dark and raining. The driver of the latter told me that the Hun still bombs and shells the famous Nijmegen bridge which, four hundred yards long, was so much in the news when the airborne army landed. Indeed from the A.A. and flares it looked as if the Hun were having another go at that moment.

Nijmegen, with its 50,000 inhabitants, was a larger town than I expected, and I soon got lost looking for the Canadian C.M.P.s. However, when I found them, the Orderly Corporal made no trouble about turning out a jeep to take me on my way, and I wondered if a British N.C.O. would have been allowed so much authority. The nearer we got to the bridge, the more damage was there to be seen. It gave me an eerie feeling as we began to cross, with the moonlight struggling through the clouds and a rattle of musketry from time to time. The defence of this bridge must be an interesting problem as it is in sight of the enemy on the next bend of the river. Not only do they shell it and try to bomb it, but they also float mines down towards it, so our men on the banks, and in armoured cars on the bridge itself, shoot at anything drifting downstream.

Safely over the bridge, we drove straight ahead and through the blinding rain. I had only a small-scale map and soon lost confidence in my reading of it. We came to a dead village which reminded me of Escoville. Houses were shattered, branches stricken down, and dead cattle lay about the main street. So many people in this war have driven straight through the lines to the enemy, and many more have driven on to mines. I decided to turn round. Returning, I remarked on the smell of death to my driver, and felt rather foolish when this turned out to be the brake linings. We stopped at the first house we came to and, as so often happens, the daughter of the house, who learns English at the High School, interpreted for us. They put us on our way, and without further incident we arrived an hour later at the American Regimental H.Q. at Zetten.

After an excellent supper the Executive Officer (which corresponds to our second-in-command) of the 3rd American Airborne Battalion, from whom we take over, drove me across to them. Their command post is in the outhouses of a large baronial house, of which I have so far only seen the vague outline in the moonlight.

I am writing these notes in the cellar. We have to make an early start to-morrow as one cannot walk about the forward part of this area in daylight without drawing fire. I am being called at five.

November 25th.

I slept like a log in my clothes, under a communal quilt on one of the communal palliasses.

This morning the Executive Officer led me across to one of the estate cottages, where we had a wash and shave in the kitchen sink. Breakfast over, we drove forward a mile to the huge Rhine dyke, arriving there just as it was beginning to get light. The Major then sent the jeep back, explaining that all vehicles moving in front of Battalion H.Q. can be seen from the high ground on the far side of the river, and usually draw fire. So from then onwards we walked. I had not previously soldiered with Americans. This officer, with his kindly, rugged face, his dry sense of humour, his clipped speech, his business-like efficiency, his pudding-bowl steel helmet, his short coat and tight-fitting "pants" showing a broad expanse of buttock, might have come straight out of the pages of *Life*. Though we plodded through deep mud for hours I was sorry when our trip came to an end. If all American units are as good as this one, it is not surprising that their armies have done so well.

We have to hold about a square mile of flat country with two small villages each side of it, Randwijk and Opheusden. The latter is a horrible place, our allies say, for it is full of schuines which have blown off six American feet. I must try to get out of holding it. The whole area is flat ground, broken up by a few farmhouses and avenues of trees, and overlooked from beyond the Rhine except right under the dyke. Beyond this there are two or three hundred yards of bare ground

leading to the river, which is now very swollen; it looks to be nearly a mile wide. They say that one can expect about thirty shells a day in the battalion area.

Later in the morning I went to see the Brigadier, with many good reasons why the Black Watch area should include Opheusden. To this he consented, provided I took in Randwijk, to which I was quite ready to agree. So there I went next, and found that we can hold it with only one platoon in the village itself, which will have two posts on the dyke. I want to hold our area with the minimum number of troops, so as to rest as many as possible. With all this flood-water about, the risk of being attacked would seem to be nil.

The Battalion arrived very late, and somewhat tired, having marched all the way from Nijmegen as troop-carriers are not allowed over the bridge.

I was sorry when the time came for my American friends to leave.

November 26th.

This place is going to be exhausting for the battalion commander, who always has to get up very early in order to go round the area before daylight or while the morning mist is still hanging over the ground. Walking back across the fields for 10 a.m. breakfast to-day, I saw some pinkfoot fighting very high. It reminded me of wild-fowling in Lincolnshire before the war, with the Humber instead of the Rhine.

This morning we had church parade in the Baron's private chapel, which apparently is sufficiently low church for Ewen. I read the Lesson, Isaiah, Ch. 53, which was no doubt as incomprehensible to the congregation as it was to me. Walking back across the park after the service reminded me of an English country house week-end. The moated house is certainly a lovely place. The burgomaster of Zetten told us that the estate has been a thousand years in the family of Baron Van Lynden, who at the moment is in occupied territory. When the Americans were here the house was full of refugees, but they left this morning. So this afternoon we all moved across. We shall certainly be more com-

fortable here. There were a few shells last night and I was not at all happy at the thought of more than fifty men of Battalion H.Q. sleeping on the top floor in the outhouses.

November 27th.

The Brigadier walked round with me early this morning. He told me that the Huns may well flood us out of this position. They only have to breach the dykes to the east, to flood everything to a depth of three feet in twelve hours. In that case we should have a rush to get off the island, and of course the enemy would stonk the bridge while we were doing so; with one or two trucks brewing up on it, it could well become a death-trap. A scheme for a withdrawal (Operation Noah) is being prepared, and orders are coming out for all transport that is not essential to be sent off the Island to-morrow.

My policy here is to live and let live, so that we can get a good rest. We do not shoot at the enemy unless they shoot at us. But I have said that every shell or machine-gun burst they send over the river is to be returned threefold.

I tried to catch up with the office work this evening: citations for the last canal crossing, recommendations of N.C.O.s for commissions, a letter from the General about enemy mines, a new medical pamphlet, an instruction on the disposal of men below a certain medical category, another about misuse of army equipment, and so on for three hours and a half.

November 28th.

A Company have a platoon post rather far out, and last night they rang up to say that they could hear a lot of firing in that direction and their line to them was cut. It sounded like an enemy raid and I sweated a bit at the thought of it. However, two men of a ration party walked into A Company H.Q., having just returned from that post, and said that the firing had all been coming from the direction of Opheusden.

There was a conference about schu-mines at Brigade to-day. To get back quickly from the morning round I took a chance and had my jeep meet me at C Company. This was inexcusable as it brought down an accurate mortar shoot on them. Alec

says that he was hit by a piece of brick on his way to the cellar, and the C.S.M., who was having his breakfast, got some plaster in his mess tin. Luckily there were no casualties.

It is D plus five, so to speak, and still there does not seem to be any decision as to who is going to command the Battalion. Meanwhile I am doing what I consider necessary while I still have the chance. To-day, for instance, I warned the M.T.O., reduced Sergeant F. to private, promoted thirty-three N.C.O.s, applied for a warrant officer to be sent home and ordered a complete overhaul and repaint of all M.T.

Everybody is very interested in the water level on the Island. We have to check it three times a day and report to Brigade.

November 29th.

How lucky we are not to be holding Opheusden!

The Black Watch are having a lot of bother there. Two days ago they lost an officer and a sergeant on schu-mines. Yesterday they lost a company commander, taken prisoner while on a recce, they think. Last night some of the many wild animals that are roaming around stampeded and started blowing themselves up on anti-personnel mines, with the result that the Huns in front of Opheusden thought that they were being attacked and brought down their D.F.

There are only three Dutch in the whole battalion area. The Americans told them that they might get shot; they replied that they are too old to be frightened of that and their only dread is of being moved. The area must have been evacuated very suddenly, for in Randwijk the joints are still hanging in the butcher's shop. The village has been badly looted by the Americans. Of one formation it is said that they used bazookas to open a safe, and that their C.O. remarked he did not object to this, but when it came to using an anti-tank gun . . . Not that British troops can talk about looting, I am afraid. Many of the ground-floor rooms are now occupied by tame rabbits, pigs and cattle. I'm told that the General said: "Good-morning" to a goat looking out of a bedroom window.

At lunch-time the Brigadier rang up and said: "Did Harry tell you that there was a possibility of Grant-Peterkin coming to

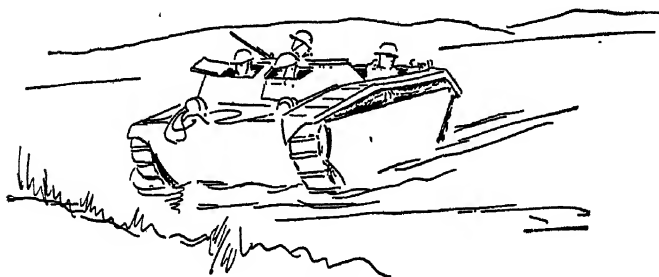
take over the Battalion? Well, he's arrived. He's on his way round to you now."

I must admit he seems rather a good chap.

November 30th.

I took the new C.O. all round early this morning: the usual waddle through the mud after a dawn start, returning in the mist about 9.30 a.m. There was more firing from the other side than usual, single shots and short bursts: the Hun doing the scruffy soldier's trick of cleaning the rust out of his barrel by firing. Afterwards I heard an odd tap-tapping and thought that it must be a machine-gun a long way off, though indeed the "bursts" did not sound quite as one would expect. Then I looked up and saw that I had been listening to a woodpecker.

There has been a rise of two and a half feet in the level of the Rhine in the last twelve hours, but still no change on the Island.



Buffalo

December 1st.

I HAD a realistic dream last night: that I was standing on a bridge, that the enemy started to shell it and that I jumped very quickly into a slit-trench. I woke up to find myself lying on the floor, with shells landing outside in the park. We are shelled a little every night. Luckily the enemy does not repeat this in the daytime, or we should certainly get casualties among people moving about. I can only imagine that the Hun thinks that we have a lot of M.T. bringing up rations and supplies during the night.

Just after dark yesterday evening a private of 11th Parachute Battalion, who had been lying up on the other side since Arnhem, crossed the Rhine in a boat and walked into A Company. It was a very stout effort and I am only sorry I missed seeing him.

Douglas Renny and I are off to Brussels on three days' leave to-morrow. There is still no rise in the water level, but most people seem to think that the Island may well be flooded before we get back. If this is so I shall be sorry. I have grown quite attached to this spot: to the view across the Rhine from the dyke, to the long avenues of poplars and the wild-fowl fighting overhead, to the flooded fields and ditches and the morning shoulders of mist, to the pigs in the parlours of Randwijk and, to this baronial hall, the most comfortable H.Q. we have so far had.

December 2nd.

We got away soon after lunch, in Douglas's big staff-car.

I felt very care-free. At Louvain we stopped for a haircut and shampoo, and I ate a pound of luscious grapes during the process. As to what Mr. Trumper would have thought of this I just did not care. After supper we went to a night club. The girls were as pretty as birds. The saxophones gulped and shivered, retched and heaved. But Douglas and I soon felt more than ready for bed. Both of us were too tired to enjoy ourselves, drink or no drink.

December 3rd.

Last night for the first time for a month I did not have to sleep in my socks to keep warm. Oh, the joy of central heating and a private bathroom!

The Plaza is very comfortable. Joyce and I stayed here before the war, and the dressing-table this morning looked very bare without her things on it. It is now being run by N.A.A.F.I. as an officers' leave hotel and is very popular, not least because they have a stock of captured German liquor which is being sold off at such prices as three francs for a gin or brandy, about one-twentieth of the price outside. Sensible people stoke up well before going out for the evening, though, as Douglas says, this practice does smack somewhat of organisation.

Since all the restaurants are closed, we lunched at the Officers' Club in rue d'Arlon. On the way there we were stopped in the street by an old man, small, dark and ferrety; his front teeth were all gold and his clothes as black as his market. He wanted us to change some notes for him. Trafficking in currencies is of course a court-martial offence and we sent him about his business.

After lunch we went to the races: two on the flat, two over hurdles and two 'chases. There were a few British officers riding, presumably from 21 Army Group H.Q. in Brussels. It is one of those tricky figure-of-eight courses, like Bournemouth where I threw away a race in 1927 by getting lost.

By dinner-time Douglas had become attached to a Belgian count, so I teamed up with two of the 15-19th Hussars. They told me that they never have any trouble over deserters. This is perhaps not surprising as tank crews are all a very good type, whereas infantry have to take the bad with the good. On the other hand, they are faced with an increasingly large number who say that they can never again fight in a tank: usually men who have escaped from one that was on fire, with perhaps unpleasant results to the others in their crew. We had a grouse against the ground staffs of the R.A.F., so many of whom seem to be stationed in Brussels. Of course this was most unreasonable for we cannot win the war without them. But let us hope they realise how lucky they are compared with the rank and file of the infantry.

After dinner we went the rounds. By chance we found ourselves in one of the bars where the young Belgian *maquis* had brought me early in September. The *patron* was miserable and looking ten years older. His wife's arm has just been amputated. She was accidentally shot by one of the young resistance youths on a self-appointed patrol. In La Popesco I ran into David Scott-Moncrieff, on his way through to France to buy some wine for the Mess. As far as I could make out, he was talking art to a tart.

"And how many Rubens have you in the Beaux Arts?" I heard him ask.

The blondie blinked at him goggle-eyed.

December 4th.

This morning I bought a lot of Christmas presents, mostly toys for the children.

Douglas and I lunched together and he was very interesting about 5-7th Gordons' last action beyond the Zig Canal. He was with a forward company when it was counter-attacked. Over the wireless he called for the D.F., but the Battery Commander queried it as he considered it too close. Douglas sprinted all the way back to his H.Q. and ordered it down a hundred yards beyond his leading position. He says that he felt most uncomfortable about running lest this should give a bad impression, but he considers that if he had not done so the company would have been overrun. During this action he saw a Jock sitting on the top of the earth excavated from his slit-trench, firing a bren, rifle and piat in turn into the mist, and shouting out abuse at the enemy, in Gaelic!

After lunch we went to the Waterloo Golf Club and played eight holes, with vigour but no great degree of skill. On the way back I paid a duty call on a Belgian cousin by marriage. I had a vague idea that I had seen her some years before, at a family wedding in London. My impression was of a rather plain and disagreeable girl, so I had put off this visit until near the end of my last day. Never did I make a greater mistake, for Livia is charming. She speaks perfect English, and produced her two boys for me to see if there was a trace of likeness to mine.

Later she took me out to dinner at the house of a Belgian

diplomat. I tried to steer the talk round to conditions under the occupation, no easy task as everybody only wants to forget it. However, Livia did say feelingly how awful it was to wonder each morning what bad news the day would bring forth: usually that some friend had to be hidden, or had been shot or imprisoned or deported to Germany, or had disappeared without a trace. Our host said that he loved England, but he *did* wish we could have had just fifteen days of occupation by the Germans, so that we could understand what it was like.

I think he was right when he implied that we English do not, cannot understand. I was astonished when they told me that until now there had been no dancing in Belgium since 1940. I pointed out that during our darkest days we danced in England. They replied that there was hardly a woman in Belgium who had not either a father, husband, brother or lover who was not either dead, prisoner of war, or in hiding. As Livia put it, "We have had no cause at all to dance, and even now we only do so to entertain our liberators."

December 5th.

To-day I lunched with Livia, to meet her mother who is Lady-in-Waiting to the Belgian Queen Mother. The Baroness told me that, though they had an English mother, she and her brother were brought up in her father's nationality, Italian. She said that his family is now dying out for the only young male was killed at Alamein. I thought to myself that he may well have been killed by the Highland Division, and how absurd this all is.

December 6th.

Before starting back this morning we got word that the Brigade had left the Island, so we drove straight to its new location south-east of 'S-Hertogenbosch. I gather that Noah did not function too well when the floods came, and that it was a bit of a scramble getting away, though there were no casualties and no great loss of equipment. The Hun crossed the Rhine in boats and sniped at us as we were withdrawing. Only 49th Division is now left on the Island, holding a small perimeter round the Nijmegen bridgehead.

December 7th.

I am feeling immensely better as the result of my leave. For the last month I had been getting very tired and irritable and, worst of all, increasingly jumpy.

December 8th.

Nobody knows what is in store for us or how long we shall be out of the line, so we are planning some training and I am to start a Cadre for junior N.C.O.s on Monday.

December 9th.

Jim Cassels, who commands 152 Brigade, had supper with us this evening and gave us an explanation as to why our last canal crossing was mounted in such a hurry.

Melville, who commands a company in 5th Camerons, was told only to cross if there were no opposition. Like his brother, he is a superb natural leader, and he decided that the Germans holding the far bank did not amount to "opposition." So his company attacked them, killed six and took thirty prisoners, and the rest ran away. Another company was pushed across at once, and all next day they were shelled or counter-attacked; but the position was held and that night two more battalions were put across. At the same time our Brigade advanced on the right, and the result was that the Division on our left was not called upon. Melville has just been given a well-deserved D.S.O. and sent off on forty-eight hours' leave to Antwerp. He was last heard of driving a tram, and Jim is awaiting a plaintive letter from the Town Major.

December 10th.

We are in Berlicum, a small village six miles from 'S-Hertogenbosch.

I have a comfortable room in the local constable's house. There is a small, frightened boy of thirteen in the family who has had a large piece of shell through his shoulder; but luckily it is healing up well, with no loss of movement to his arm. The policeman told me to-day that ten people round here, including some children, have been blown up on Bosche mines, and that

one of them was killed trying to bury a German corpse that had been booby-trapped.

Ewen is running a Battalion rest centre at 'S-Hertogenbosch, in a hotel which we have taken over and temporarily renamed the Bydand Arms. There is no lack of girls willing to wait, and two dance bands which are only too anxious to play for an evening for a hundred cigarettes. The men's Christmas dinner is to take place here, so I only hope that no unforeseen move occurs.

We had two M.E. 109's very low over here to-day. It was only the third time that I have seen enemy aircraft since I landed on the beaches.

December 11th.

A letter arrived to-day from Beardwell, the young officer who distinguished himself on patrol before being badly wounded at Lisieux.

He wrote: "The surgeon at the C.C.S. had to remove one of my kidneys and also sliced off some liver . . . I was sorry to learn the sad news of David Martin's death. He saved my life by plugging up the hole in my back with a shell dressing and so stopped some of the blood getting away, while under rifle fire. He was a damn brave man."

Of course, dear David never mentioned this.

December 12th.

The N.C.O.s' Cadre has started well, for these young lads are so keen.

Perhaps we all enjoy the discussions most. The first was about our war aims, and I found them surprisingly well able to express what we are all fighting for. The next subject was: "Why I will (not) choose the Army as a post-war career." All thirty said they will not stay on after the war, and the reason given was the same in each case, that they want the greater freedom of civvy street after the factory hooter has blown. They all agree that they have been happy and well cared for while in the Army, but they want a life where there will be no discipline after 5 p.m., no night exercises, no dress regulations, no orderly sergeant to

shout "Lights out" and turn them out of bed at Reveille. Marriage is regarded as an unequivocal disqualification for Army life. This is only to be expected, since there was no marriage allowance below the age of thirty before the war and men were many years on the waiting-list before being allotted a married quarter.

December 13th.

I ran down to Antwerp last night and arrived a few minutes after a V1 had landed on a cinema and the adjoining N.A.A.F.I. restaurant. There must have been several hundred casualties to soldiers on leave. A lot of damage has been caused by flying bombs, and after to-day's disaster the Divisional Rest Camp will no doubt be closed down.

David Scott-Moncrieff has returned from his mission, after many adventures. On reaching Reims he was told that he had to obtain special authority from the Paris director of Heidseick if he wished to buy more than six bottles. On arriving there he was promptly arrested by the Assistant Provost Marshal, since the city is out of bounds and his "on duty" pass signed by the C.O. was inadmissible according to the regulations. David bitterly resents this as Paris is an old friend of his, and he now describes the A.P.M. as "the worst kind of Englishman—the Englishman abroad!" He was given half an hour to get out. On the way back he came to an overturned army lorry, full of champagne and deserted by its driver. Some civilians were beginning to loot it. He cursed them in his fluent, faultless French for stealing wine belonging to the British Government. They helped him transfer it all to his truck and David drove on, at full speed!

December 14th.

We heard to-day that 5th Black Watch and 5-7th Gordons have each had an officer away on a "secret mission" which ended far less satisfactorily. Wilding of the 5-7th spent three days in a Paris prison cell while they checked up on his statement. The Black Watch officer fared even worse, having £200 in Belgian francs stolen from his sporran in a night club.

December 15th.

Monty has held an Investiture, at which officers and men of the Division who have been awarded decorations were presented with the ribbon. Afterwards he made a speech in which he said that the German Army is on its knees and, having no petrol, will never again be able to mount an offensive.

December 16th.

The Divisional Commander has been to a conference at Corps H.Q. This is a bad sign. I hope to goodness they do not move us, as most elaborate arrangements have been made for the men's Christmas dinners.

December 17th.

Grant-Peterkin is a tremendous success as C.O. He has personality, brains and charm, but above all, drive and enthusiasm. He is a tall, well-built man with sharp features and very blue eyes, clean-shaven, and fair hair brushed nearly straight back.

This afternoon I went to the Field Cashier at Division and noticed all the brigadiers coming out of the General's caravan. I wonder what is in the wind?

December 18th.

The day opened with a conference of C.O.s at Brigade, and in due course Grant-Peterkin returned with a lot of secret stuff for my ear alone. We make a non-operational move eastwards to Beers to-morrow, for the purpose of getting into position to attack through the Reichswald and up to the Rhine early in the New Year. As this concentration must be kept hidden from the enemy, to-morrow's move is to take place after dark.

So off I went to recce Beers. It will be rather a squash, with Brigade H.Q. taking the biggest and best buildings, none of which are large enough for the Christmas dinners.

December 19th.

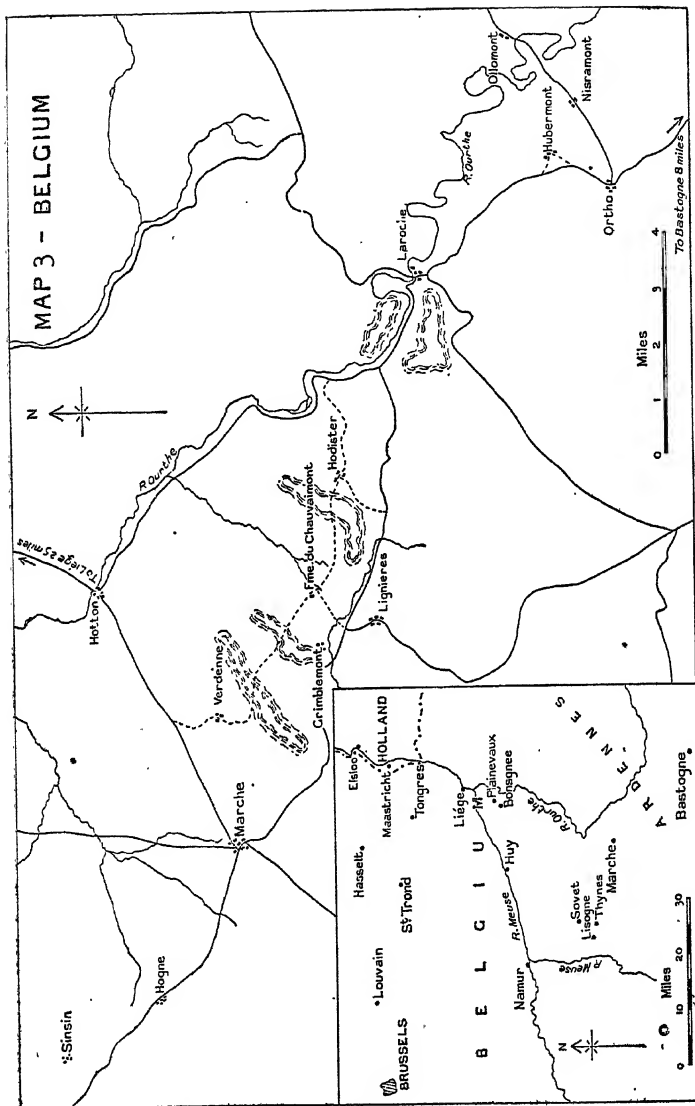
The Battalion has just left for Beers, while I am stopping behind at Berlicum to finish off the last three days of the cadre. It seems very quiet with only myself and Murray, my servant, alone in this house.

I have been studying the map. The Reichswald lies beyond the German frontier. It will be good to be fighting on enemy soil at last. After all these years I find it hard to realise that we shall so soon be invading Germany.

Incidentally, in spite of what Monty said a few days ago, the Huns have attacked in the Ardennes. The last report said they have penetrated some distance, though this is obviously untrue. It can hardly amount to much.



Mortar



Part Three

BELGIUM

December 20th.

HALF-WAY THROUGH the morning, while I was in the middle of a lecture, a D.R. arrived with a mysterious message from the Adjutant: "Bring in the cadre, for we are moving far."

On the way to Beers I passed, going in the opposite direction, forty or fifty jeeps and 15-cwt. trucks with the familiar HD in crimson on a blue background. I looked closely at each and it did not take me long to realise that they were unit advance parties. And all going south, whereas only last night the Division had been moving north! I asked myself what could be the cause of this sudden, unexpected turn-about, and could only come to one possible conclusion: that we were being rushed south to stop the new German thrust in the Ardennes. I had reinstated young Akers when my new jeep arrived. Now I told him to step on it.

I found Battalion H.Q. eating a hurried lunch. "Advance parties to Hasselt" was the only information they had so far been given, so we seized some bully beef and biscuits and drove straight off again.

It was a long run down to Hasselt and dark when we arrived. I could see no sign of any Brigade representatives, so went to Corps H.Q. in the Royal Imperial Girls' School. Here there was chaos. The schoolyard was hopelessly jammed with all kinds of transport, to the confusion of several cussing, honking drivers. There were no lights or signs, and the dark passages within were thronged with soldiery who did not belong to the H.Q. With difficulty I found my way to the map-room. Here, if there was not precisely a flap on, they were certainly taking a keen interest in the German break-through. G Branch had no idea where the Highland Division was to be found and had never heard of 153

Brigade. "But you must have some communications to a Division under your command," I expostulated. Well, perhaps if I returned an hour later they might have.

Another Highland officer, now part of this H.Q., took me downstairs to look for food. In a large class-room we found a cook ladling out stew. Worried-looking staff officers were in the queue with clerks and orderlies and the crews of the Guards' tanks which were blocking the yard outside.

We borrowed two mess tins and mugs from the kitchen, and found a table in a corner. I asked at once for details of the battle. My friend told me that it started on December 16th. The Germans attacked with twenty-two divisions, including a high proportion of armour, on a frontage of twenty-five miles and where the Americans were numerically rather weak. Hitler himself addressed representatives of each formation before it started. They have now reached a point thirty-five miles south-west of Liège.

It came as a complete surprise to the Allies. In this connection the Field Marshal's remarks a day or two before it began—"The enemy can never again mount a major attack"—should be remembered; not to sneer at a very great general but to show the fallibility of our Intelligence Service, which failed to give warning of other German coups, such as the invasion of Norway.

Still nobody could tell me where the Division was, but this time they did at least know the general area it had been allotted. I drove there and soon picked up the little green 87 lights which led me to Brigade H.Q. in Bourg-Léopold. There I had a chat with the Brigadier, who had a bottle of brandy. We agreed that this German thrust is an excellent move, and I don't think the spirit was responsible for our reasoning. We consider that it should be easier to destroy the enemy out here on our own ground and away from his wire and mine-fields, his concrete emplacements, his carefully-sited lines of fire and his ammunition dumps: the formidable defences of the Siegfried Line. Roddy Sinclair is such a good chap and I was sorry when it was time to leave.

The Battalion has been allotted Tessenderloo, an attractive little old market-town, at least so it looks in the dark. In the square I met the signal sergeant, who pointed out the house

chosen for our H.Q. I rang the bell and was surprised to be greeted in French; somehow I had overlooked the fact that we are in Belgium once more. Now I am awaiting the arrival of the Battalion and hope they will all find the way here. It is difficult for tired drivers to pick up unit signs at night.

I must remember to carry my shell dressing and morphia capsule, if we really are going to fight once more.

December 21st.

The first event this morning was a conference at Brigade, which the C.O. and I both attended.

Somewhat unsuccessfully we tried to find out more about the general situation. The Brigadier himself has not been able to discover what reserves the Americans still have in hand. As far as I could make out from the map, there was nothing to stop the German spearhead except the Household Cavalry Regiment on the line of the Meuse. Then came the thunderbolt: the Highland Division was to take up a defensive position round Louvain, which is only fifteen miles from Brussels itself! The situation must be serious indeed.

And that is where we are now, with 1st Gordons in a little straggling agricultural village about three miles south-east of Louvain. On the way here I had a word with Jerry Shiel, the C.R.A.¹ and one of the best-known figures in the Division. He is of the same opinion as the Brigadier: that it is better to fight the Hun out in the open, rather than back among his defences. But John Frary does not agree with these commanders. He mistrusts all this talk to the effect that it is a good thing to be attacked by twenty-two divisions, for it reminds him of the general attitude after the fall of France: "So the Germans have overrun another country. Now we know where we stand. Jolly good show!" We call John the dormouse because he likes his bed so much, but he does not sleep when signal lines have to be run out.

The wireless to-night has certainly emphasised the gravity of the situation. It began by quoting from the German radio, which claims that they have taken 20,000 prisoners, destroyed or captured 179 tanks and fifty guns, etc. It gave news of parachutists

¹ Brig. Shiel was killed in action on April 29th, 1945, the last casualty in the Division.

being dropped in American uniforms (of which we were officially warned this morning). It spoke of flying bombs being used to support the attack, and even of a new compressed-air shell which is said to have (I wonder?) the effect of deflating the lungs of everybody within twenty yards, so a slit-trench is presumably no protection. And finally: "All correspondents are agreed that the attack is not likely to be halted before Christmas."

I would give a lot to know what the form is in Brussels to-night. No doubt it is much the same in the Plaza and La Popesco, but I wonder what the more responsible people are thinking? Let us hope there will be no premature digging of trenches and loopholing of walls round here, or the civilians will certainly get the wind up.

December 22nd.

After the fourth move in four days we have arrived at Esloo, a little village seven miles north of Maastricht, at which I was told to meet a representative of Brigade at midday.

The R.V. was at American Corps H.Q., and there was some confusion as it is split into two, Forward and Rear, and Rear is more forward than Forward. While waiting for the others to appear I went inside to study the situation map. The two main panzer thrusts are apparently being held, as their leading elements are no further forward than they were two days ago. 101 U.S. Airborne Division, our friends from the Island, are completely surrounded at Bastogne, though, according to my informant, they say they are not and only need more ammunition. Identifications of panzer and panzer grenadier divisions have been obtained to the north of what is now termed the bulge, suggesting that a thrust may well be coming from that direction. So we have been moved across into a convenient reserve position.

Battalion H.Q. is in the usual klooster, but rather more interesting than most, as it is a nice country house built round the ruin of a thirteenth-century castle, complete with moat. We had trouble at first with the Father Superior's representative, a superior young abbot of about my own age. He had obviously plenty of accommodation but said that he could only give us one or two rooms and not till next day. After we had taken possession he

was to be seen flitting down the passages like a lost spirit, muttering about "Hitler methods."

Outside the American H.Q. this morning was a jeep with the following inscription below the windscreen:

"Dedicated to the men who died in the jeeps from which this jeep was built."

December 23rd.

Our rôle of being in reserve gives us hope that we may be here for a few days yet, so to-day I went round the companies to see how they would be placed for their Christmas dinner. They will not fare too badly: A Company in a hall, B in a couple of pubs, C in two large farmhouses, and so on. In one of the pubs I found Bob dancing the tango with a waitress at 10 a.m. Total war!

The Hun is still using paratroops. They are said to have dropped two hundred behind our lines last night, and that they are driving round the countryside in American uniforms. So our jeep was very carefully examined as we drove into Maastricht.

The more I see of the Americans, the more I like them. To-day I took Jack Johnston to their hospital to have three teeth out, and they could not possibly have been kinder. They seem to have so much more pep about all their activities. Take welfare, for instance, and contrast the dreary British dental waiting-room, where you are lucky if you are given a compo box to sit on, with the one we went into to-day, decorated with a Christmas tree, pin-up girls, paper decorations, carnival lanterns, crystallised fruit, etc. Look at Maastricht: practically a front-line town, corresponding say to Nijmegen in our sector, yet with plenty of entertainment and several first-class American clubs for both officers and other ranks. And when the Americans run a club they put in charge of it the most sophisticated and attractive married women they can find. The British, on the other hand, usually staff it with the type of spinster who looks as if she is in need of welfare herself.

December 24th.

We are still here, and hoping that the gastronomic orgies of to-morrow will not be interrupted.

December 25th.

A series of warning orders arrived during the morning, each one slightly increasing in tempo.

We put forward the men's dinners from 5 p.m. to 2 p.m., though without any great degree of confidence. At 12.30 p.m. orders arrived for us to move at 2.15 p.m. Nobody knew where we were going, nor why. The G 2 at Division looked in to wish us a merry Christmas. "I only know that we are moving south in a hurry, so it must be rather serious," he said.

As usual, I rushed on ahead with company representatives to allot accommodation in the new area. Outside American Army H.Q. at Tongres the Brigade staff captain told us that the Division was moving to just south of Liège. He then gave each of us our unit area. As we drove through the city there was a dog-fight going on overhead. For the German Air Force to be up in strength in daylight is something altogether new. Liège is a huge place and on Christmas Day it looked very derelict. Few houses seem to have any glass, yet the damage is less than that in London in 1940-41. Leaving the town and climbing out of the Meuse valley on to the wooded high ground to the south, we found ourselves mixed up with part of our gunners' column, some cars of Division H.Q. and a few odd trucks and ambulances, all hopelessly lost. None of us had better than 1-100,000 maps, so frequently we jumped out of our cars to shout at each other: "Happy Christmas. Where the hell are we?"

Perhaps Christmas had a little to do with it. Yet few formations have done anything so creditable as that move at short notice on Christmas Day. The sappers say that every one of their drivers was drunk, but never before have they completed a move without a single vehicle breaking down. There were certainly a few comic sights, such as a sergeant of 5-7th Gordons riding in the front of a carrier, wearing neither hat nor coat, in fact scarcely anything except a very happy smile, and frantically waving a small red flag. Liège is said to be one of the most communist towns in Europe. At any rate, this spectacle drove the population almost into a frenzy and largely accounted for the warmth of our welcome.

The country round Bonsgnée is very steep, but most attractive.

Just to the south of us there are several lovely wooded valleys and a river in spate. It reminds me in places of the Speyside, of parts of Derbyshire, of an approach to the Alpes Maritimes, even of the way through the hills to Kashmir. But as a billeting area for a battalion it appalled me. There was one modern house and two or three farms on the top of a ridge. I stood on a precipice and gazed at the panorama below me. It was certainly beautiful, but there was an almost total lack of houses. So a hurried visit to Brigade H.Q. was necessary, as the result of which we were given accommodation in Plâinevaux, which had hitherto been allotted entirely to the Black Watch.

When I got back to the house on the top of the hill, after going round the companies, it was to find that Battalion H.Q. had fallen on its feet for Christmas Day. Our host, M. Lalou, is a director of various companies in Liège and he and his wife are a charming couple. They said at once: "But of course you will dine with us to-night." So in the end, and so very unexpectedly, we had a most enjoyable Christmas dinner party.

Afterwards we lit the tree in the oak-panelled hall. I went down to the cellar and brought up Michel, aged four. The servant also fetched her daughter, and somebody had the wit to make these two small children kneel down together to say their prayers in front of the little crib by the side of the Christmas tree. Of course they looked perfectly adorable! The flickering light of the candles was reflected on their bowed heads, and on the lined and weather-beaten faces of the six or eight officers forming circle round them. Their childish prayers were in shrill falsetto against the deep bass of the R/T earphones still crackling and burbling away in a corner.

From time to time we all went out on to the terrace, to listen to the flying bombs speeding overhead and to look down at the lovely, moonlit panorama of the snow-covered valley below us.

We are all delighted to find ourselves in such beautiful country after that dull, flat, damned, Dutch land.¹

¹ There is, of course, another and very attractive Holland further north, but we had not as yet discovered this.

December 26th.

Another clear, cold, frosty day and the ice is bearing on the garden pond. We awoke to the song of the guns far away to the south. The Hun still seems to be making some progress, in spite of the R.A.F. who flew 7,000 sorties on Christmas Eve and dropped 10,000 tons of bombs upon their lines of communication. But they have still not quite reached the Meuse, along which we now have 6th Airborne Division, who were rushed out here in the hell of a hurry a few days ago.

December 27th.

We are having a delightful time with this charming Belgian family. Fortunately we are able to return their hospitality with a few of the things they cannot procure, such as a greater range of food and a little coal (three sandbags-full, to be precise). The defaulters have cut firewood and the Pioneers boarded up the panes that have been blown out by flying bombs. These missiles fly over on their way to Liège at an average rate of one every forty-five minutes. Many land close enough to rattle the windows, two of which have been blown out in the short time we have been here.

December 28th.

We get very little news as to what is happening in the bulge, in fact only what is given on the wireless.

It seems clear that the German thrust is now completely halted. For some time they have failed to turn up northwards and only succeeded in extending further to the west. Had they been able to keep up the momentum of the early days and to turn up northwards and cross the Meuse in force, Brussels would have been not far off and they would soon have been astride our lines of communication. But I cannot believe they ever had any real chance of getting so far and achieving such results.

For the first week the weather, though cold, was foggy and the Air Forces were unable to do much. But they have certainly been making up for it since. They must be doing tremendous havoc to the enemy supplies and communications in this clear,

frosty weather. We counted 140 Lancasters going over less than an hour ago.

There is a good deal of argument amongst ourselves as to whether we are likely to be used, for the Americans may consider it a point of honour to clear it all up without using British troops. But I feel sure that of all our divisions we have the best chance.

December 29th.

Nowadays few battalions ever take their pipers into battle, since it is impossible to replace them if they become casualties. I think that this policy is right, though I am never very comfortable about it, since it is so contrary to the traditions of a Highland regiment.

Our pipers have been piping and dancing reels in Brussels for over a month, and to-day the C.O. sent me to look them up.

There seems to have been some panic among the civilians, who were afraid that the enemy would reach Brussels and then proceed to take it out of them for their jubilation at being liberated.

I got back in time to hear the 9 p.m. news, in which the Germans are reported to have admitted that they have begun to retire. Moreover, they have even said that their withdrawal in the centre is due to the fact that they were fighting "the famous 51st Highland Division." This explained an odd remark of Livia's when I telephoned to her. She was very surprised to hear my voice and said: "But aren't you fighting?" to which I replied: "Not to-day."

December 30th.

An account of German activities in American uniforms has been circulated.

They have been organised in jeep parties of three or four with missions of sabotage or intelligence. The three whom the Americans announced shooting a few days ago, a cadet officer and two N.C.O.s, were provided with all the necessary papers and equipment, and were even coached about formations so that they could answer questions. This party was ordered to report upon the bridges over the Meuse by wireless, but they had been

behind our lines only half an hour when they were asked for the password and, not knowing it, were arrested.

There is a good story about Bubbly Burnett, who commands the Field Regiment that supports us. He, too, did not know the password, nor had he his identity card on him, so the doughboys insisted upon taking down his trousers to see whether he was wearing German pants.

December 31st.

It has been a quiet and pleasant week, except for the VI's, which are still flying over to the tune of about fifty a day. Liège is said to have had no less than eighty-eight during the hours of darkness last night. Brigade H.Q. had one in the garden of their chateau this morning and several people were cut by glass, though fortunately none seriously.

This afternoon we were discussing the advisability of starting some training when a warning order arrived to the effect that we shall probably move to-morrow. No particulars were given and there was much speculation as to whether it would be to the north and back to Holland, or southwards to fight.

Half-way through dinner a message giving our destination arrived. It was sent out for the Intelligence Section to decode, and after a quarter of an hour Sergeant Childs came in and handed the I.O. a piece of paper. Military security precluded us from telling our host and hostess where we were moving, so we were unable to satisfy our curiosity until Madame rose from the table. Then David whispered: "South," and a great thrill ran through us all.

Afterwards we sat round the huge log fire and played old-fashioned games with pencil and paper until the moment came to see the New Year in, which was done in the traditional manner. Then, and for the last time, we went out on to the terrace to look down at that lovely, frost-bound, moonlit valley. Far away below us a light twinkled where one of the companies was having its own carousal.

I wondered how many of our little company would see this brave new year to its close.

January 1st, 1945.

WE BADE an almost tearful farewell this morning to M. and Mme. Lalou; to Christian, the girl of fourteen; and to little Michel, a rather backward child in consequence of a double mastoid, whom we had seen putting on weight and increasing in colour and liveliness each day, as the result of our good rations. We felt very sorry to be leaving them behind in their fly-bomb area.

Whatever we may have thought when we received the signal last night, our new area seems to be as peaceful and far removed from war as the last one.

Sovet looked all right on the map when I was given it as a billeting area this morning, but when I got there I found that the S.S. boys had preceded me and burnt most of the houses down in reprisal for maquis activity. No other unit seemed to be interested in Thynes and Lisogne, so we went there instead: two very nice little villages in an agricultural countryside.

January 2nd.

The C.O. has been to Brigade, who say that we may be here a fortnight, so we are starting training in earnest the day after to-morrow. It is all rather an anti-climax, though indeed we might be in many worse places. To-day we shot the neighbouring baronial coverts, though we only managed to bring down one of the eight or nine pheasants we flushed.

Immense interest is being taken in the home leave which has just started. Why is A Branch always so incompetent? The latest General Routine Order is to the effect that the fighting troops' vacancies for February and March will be greatly cut down "*as it has been found that leave allocations for Line of Communication formations had been under-estimated.*" Nobody blames them for having made a miscalculation, but why publish such a tactless explanation?

Last night I saw the figures of the four rifle companies' casualties since D-Day. They are really appalling. Their combined officer strength is 20; their casualties have been 9 killed and 30 wounded. Their combined Other Ranks' strength is 500; their casualties have been 149 killed and 351 wounded, a total of exactly 500.

And this with half the fighting still to take place!

January 3rd.

McHaggis is in the news to-day.

He joined the battalion during the three weeks we were holding the line near St. Oedenrode, an old, plausible soldier amongst a draft of youngsters. He spun Harry a glib yarn about the lengths to which he had gone in order to get himself posted to us, on the strength of which, and especially because of his name, Harry appointed him his personal orderly. But there was never room in Harry's jeep or carrier for McHaggis, as well as the necessary signallers, so before long he was sent to a rifle company. That same night he went absent. A few days later his conduct sheets arrived and showed him to be a thoroughly bad character who had already deserted several times. That was over two months ago, and since then a batch of military police charges against him has reached us at least once a week, the last one on each sheet being invariably "escaping from custody." However, at last he was brought back to us under escort, but this morning he escaped, driving off in the truck containing the pipes and drums and the pipers' kilts. Of course, this is a disaster of first magnitude and one which will make us the laughing stock of the Division.

January 4th.

Liège has had only six flying bombs since we left the neighbourhood. As they only began when we came, it would seem that they were primarily intended for the discomfort of 51st Highland Division. No doubt an agent identified the Division passing through—not very difficult with HD on all our vehicles—and wirelessly news of our arrival to the enemy.

We move further south to-morrow, but as far as we can make out there is still no definite rôle for us.

January 5th.

For a change I was the last to leave Lisogne to-day.

But not before a deputation, headed by the village *curé*, arrived about the looting and vandalism of our predecessors. I listened patiently to two old villagers, each with a long list of their stolen or damaged property. Then I accompanied the *curé* on a tour of inspection. Each house we entered had been sacked: ransacked from top to bottom with the contents of each drawer and cupboard strewn upon the floor. I knew to which division they belonged, and perhaps I was not very surprised when I was told the name of the unit. For this Irish battalion had been in the next barracks to mine a year before. They stole our N.A.A.F.I. safe and a lot of kit out of the Quartermaster stores. They rifled the officers' bedrooms while we were all out watching a boxing competition. Finally they got our P.R.I. cash-box. I remember being asked at a dance what their regimental crest is, and my partner's peal of laughter when I replied that it should be a couple of jemmies and a broken lock.

January 6th.

We none of us think much of the new location. Battalion H.Q. and one company are at Hogne, in a huge derelict house that has been empty for five years. Three companies are at Sinsin, two miles away, and the remainder is spread round the country in farms. The main road between Sinsin and Hogne is usually blocked by a long column of stationary traffic, for all the roads are badly iced up.

We are certainly very much closer to the battle, for Marche, only three miles away, is under occasional shellfire. The front line runs along the high ground just beyond it and is held by 53rd Welsh Division. 51st Highland, 53rd Welsh and 6th Airborne are the only British divisions down here.

January 7th.

I walked into the Orderly Room this morning to ask the C.O. a question about a demonstration he had told me to arrange.

"You needn't think any more about it," he said. "Look at this."

He handed me a signal from Brigade, which read: "TOP SECRET WARNING ORDER REMAINDER OF DIV WILL CONC 8 JAN 153 BDE GROUP WILL ATTACK 9 JAN"

Everybody then began to laugh, at seeing me beaming all over. Nobody else wanted to go up into the snow-covered mountains to fight, at least that was their pose. It is a question of temperament. I regard boredom as the greatest evil in life and am prepared to put up with any amount of discomfort, or a reasonable measure of anxiety, to avoid it. Nor was I alone in this, for John Frary said to me later in the day: "This news has raised my morale no end. I hate running telephone lines out to companies all day long in a place like this."

While we were still discussing the news, the C.O. was called to the telephone to be told to go on leave next day, a queer state of affairs. As he said to me: "I am sent here to get practice in commanding a battalion in battle. I am not allowed to go on leave for six weeks while nothing happens. Then the day before an operation starts, I am sent on leave!"

I replied that I quite saw his point, but he could hardly expect me to sympathise as he knew I like commanding the Battalion, and especially in battle.

This afternoon we were put into the picture at Brigade H.Q. 1st Gordons are to open the innings by seizing some high ground. It starts the day after to-morrow; we should all have liked longer, but now that the Bosche is on the run we must keep cracking him.

We have not been in action since the last canal crossing six weeks ago.

January 8th.

First thing this morning I went to see the Royal Welch Fusiliers, who are now in reserve in Marche. They have been campaigning in the snow for a week or two and I wanted to ask the C.O. a few questions. He told me that in his experience a battalion can function up there for four days, after which the men are not very much use. He emphasised the importance of all the obvious points, such as a constant supply of dry socks and hot tea. We had heard of another R.W.F. battalion being badly mauled in a counter-attack, and I asked him about this. He said

they had not sufficient screen out in front to give warning and were surprised before they were dug in. Two hundred young Nazis full of brandy attacked them, supported by tanks. The battalion had three companies overrun and one hundred and sixty casualties.

I then went up into the woods, to see another battalion, through which we are going to attack to-morrow, and was horrified to find that none of them had shaved for four or five days. The forward right-hand company belongs to a different regiment and is commanded by a splendid type of officer. He is stout and grey and elderly; a connoisseur of port, I do not doubt, for he looks as if his spiritual home is in clubland rather than on that snowclad hillside. He was wearing a pre-war great-coat with brass buttons up to the shoulder. I noticed that they had been polished this morning and that he and all his men had shaved. It was obvious that he is father and mother to all the young lads under him.

Just in front of his company area and on the forward slope is an isolated farm called du Chauvaimont. When I arrived he had just returned from a small raid on it, in which he had captured five enemy and rescued a wounded British soldier. Now he led me down to just behind it, so that I could see the valley below, and the high ground on the far side which is our objective. The farm is quite visible to any enemy holding the ridge opposite. And had they been holding it they surely must have seen the Welshmen enter the farm, so the fact that they did not then mortar or shell it gives me reason to hope that they have gone back some distance, and that our advance to-morrow will be unopposed.

The General's conference was not until 2 p.m. to-day, so I went to it full of hope that the operation had been postponed twenty-four hours, as at one time had been contemplated. My face fell a mile when I heard that there was no change, for I knew what a fearful rush it would mean. The General talked till 3.30 p.m. By the time the Brigade Commander had finished and I had given the C.R.A. my fire tasks it was 5 p.m., with my own Order Group summoned for six. It then took three-quarters of an hour to drive the two miles to Sinsin, along that icebound, traffic-blocked

road. I rushed into C Company's billets and asked for a room, where I jotted down a few headings for my orders while the lamp kept going out. The electricity had also failed in the village hall, and few were able either to take notes or to see the large map that had been specially drawn by the I. Section for this briefing. So I fear that only the Company Commanders have a proper grasp of what it is all about.

Owing to the state of the roads, or rather hill tracks, we are to operate on a new scale of transport: a few four-wheel-drive 15-cwts., but mostly jeeps, carriers and weasels; the latter are like Bren-carriers but with a broader track and should have a better performance on hills and snow. This means we have been allotted extra jeeps, carriers and weasels, which have to arrive from three different places and be loaded up during the night. As for the machine-gunners, they never arrived for their orders and nobody knows where they are to be found.

I hope I shall never again have to lay on an operation in too short time with a battalion spread over five miles, with telephone lines cut and impassable roads.

If all goes well to-morrow it will be a miracle.

I feel tired and despondent, and why the hell I drive myself to write up this flaming diary each night, heaven knows.

January 9th.

We were due to start from Hogne at 5 a.m.

Corporal Robb, who has never failed us yet, produced tea and boiled eggs at 4.30 a.m. My servant and driver were not ready for me with the jeep at 4.45 a.m., as ordered, and I flew into a blinding, undignified rage.

At ten to five I was on the main road, staring through the darkness in the direction of Sinsin and wondering in what sort of muddle were the three companies due from there in five minutes' time. Judge, therefore, my astonishment when they arrived punctually, complete and in the right order. We drove five miles through Marche to the small hamlet of Verdenne, where we had breakfast at the roadside, the men sitting in the troop-carriers for warmth. With the artificial moon of the

searchlights reflected on the snow, it was a light as well as cold and frosty morning.

At seven we left the village and started up the hill. It was a long, long walk up a narrow, winding track, through snow-covered birches and firs. Slowly the stars set and the searchlights one by one went out as dawn came in the east. The rising sun tinged all the snow pink. Gradually its rays gained strength until they were reflected on the crystals of frost, so that the forest was soon shot with a million twinkling gems. It was a lovely, unforgettable sight, and there were we going to war: Frank Philip the Battery Commander, and I, walking together up that slope as if it were leading us to a ski hut or to shoot chamois.

Out of sight ahead was C Company with its troop of tanks. Behind us were two jeeps with the wireless sets. Sometimes we overtook a few men towing a sledge, home-made, of corrugated iron, and hitched it on to the back of a jeep. After two hours the trees petered out and we found ourselves on a plateau.

Up to this point the snow had been cleared by a bulldozer. But from here forward no work had been done on the track although we had been assured that it was a R.E. priority task. So now we had to find a way round across hard, frozen fields where the snow was thin, avoiding the sunken lanes where it had drifted to a depth of several feet. In this way we reached the top, just behind the R.W.F. company I had visited the day before.

A Company was now sent forward and took up position around the Ferme du Chauvaimont, to be a firm base half-way down the hill. As soon as they got there Bert Brown and his R.A.P. moved into the farm buildings, and C Company crossed the valley: a long, straggling line of black dots against the snow, their tanks bigger black blobs amongst them. I stood behind a large pile of logs in the farmyard, watching their progress and ready to launch D as soon as C were safely across. Up the slope they went and disappeared into the scrub at the top, and not a shot was fired. The only trouble was due to the depth of snow at the bottom of the valley, and the tanks had to tow the two jeeps moving with the company.

Followed by the next two companies, D and B, my Tac H.Q.

moved across the valley. Now the trouble started. The head of C Company was held up by mines just inside the woods at the top of the ridge. This slowed up everything for about two hours. Repeatedly the sapper section with them would clear the track and they would all start off again, only to come to another lot of mines fifty yards further on: they were trip-wires and linked Teller mines, very unpleasant.

While we were thus held up, the enemy started ranging on the Ferme du Chauvaimont. Shells landed on either side, an obvious bracket, and Bert, who was standing in the yard talking to Denis Aldridge, in command of A Company, shouted:

"We had better take cover!"

As he moved away a shell struck the gable end of the farmhouse. He was hit in the head, stomach and arm. His orderlies dragged him inside at once, bandaged him up and rushed him to the C.C.P. at Hotton. But when they reached it he was dead.

After shelling the farm the enemy turned their attention to the track leading through it, down which we had come and along which the last company was now strung out. They also stonked the edge of the wood behind C Company. Until they could get forward we were all held up; we could only sit there and watch the enemy artillery practice and wonder where they would decide to shoot next. There would be half a dozen loud cracks and everybody would crane their necks to see the smoke drifting away from six dirty marks on the snow. Luckily enemy observation did not extend much below du Chauvaimont and we on the next reverse slope were not visible. Meanwhile our tanks were hauling everything up the hill for us.

Owing to the mines, it took two hours to move five hundred yards. But after that we got forward quickly and soon occupied our objective: various copses astride the track which had been chosen from air-photos. It is one of those very strong natural positions which one so seldom finds: all the companies have excellent fields of fire and our tanks can cover the front hull-down. So when twelve enemy tanks were reported a mile away I fervently wished we would be counter-attacked.

In due course 5th Black Watch and 5-7th Gordons passed through us and down the track to Hodister. Food and blankets

have been trickling up to us over a long period while we seek what comfort we can in the deep snow under the fir trees. I had one 160-lb. tent and a Tilley lamp brought for the command post, in order to have light and shelter to study maps and air-photos for planning any subsequent operation. Under this four of us are quite comfortable, but I fear every one else will have a pretty miserable night.

I am desperately sorry about Bert Brown and shall miss him perhaps more than any one. We had begun a friendship which would have lasted through the years.

January 10th.

Late last night we received orders to occupy Lignieres this morning.

It was not much more than a mile away, across another, narrower valley. I decided to make straight for it by the shortest route. There was some doubt as to whether the track through the woods would be passable, so I sent on C Company with a troop of tanks and followed behind them with the Battery Commander, while the rest of the Battalion awaited further orders.

Again we were held up by mines. Gordon, the subaltern in command of the R.E. section, decided to explode them in case they were fitted with anti-handling devices. There followed a series of loud bangs, each of which sent a cloud of dust and smoke into the air, which brought back a few enemy shells.

After half a mile along an insignificant path it petered out. Though the tanks could crash through the young fir trees, the jeeps with the wireless could go no further. I followed the company on foot till I saw that they were entering Lignieres, then ran back five hundred yards to my wireless set to tell the companies to come this way and the transport to go round. Once I grovelled in the mud on hearing the whistle of a shell which landed pretty close.

Having passed the orders, I turned round and ran back again to C Company at Lignieres. I had to put them and their tanks quickly into a defensive position and arrange for artillery support

over the tank wireless in case we were counter-attacked before the rest of the battalion arrived.

The next event was a mortar concentration on the company just as they were starting to dig in, though fortunately no casualties resulted. Later we heard that this came from 9th Parachute Battalion at Grimblemont, who had not been informed of our movements, although I had expressly asked that they should be.

Gordon was very energetic on arrival here, looking for mines and booby-traps. I now noticed that he was pale and limping, and discovered that he has a nasty flesh-wound in the thigh from one of the shells which landed near the track through the woods. He had merely put on a shell-dressing and carried on, saying nothing to anybody. I shall try to get him a M.C. for these two days' work.

Lignieres (nobody can quite get this name so it is known to us as Lingerie) is a nice little agricultural village. Our command post in the largest farmhouse is rather unsatisfactory. Owing to the size of the family we have only two small rooms. Unfortunately harmony was marred from the start by their discovery that two hair-clippers were stolen after our arrival; there is no doubt that they were here, as David Scott-Moncrieff saw them on the dressing-table in this room. I have had every man's kit searched, but all to no purpose.

January 11th.

A quiet and peaceful day.

I have strafed the platoon commanders because one or two men have trench-feet as the result of standing about a long time in wet boots. Prevention of it is a question of drying socks, and those men who are out manning defensive positions must have theirs dried for them under platoon arrangements.

January 12th.

I went to a Brigade Order Group at 9 p.m., to find them in a very comfortable chateau. Laroche is now in our hands and the plan we were given is for 5th Black Watch to take Hubermont, after which 5-7th Gordons go through to Ortho and we to

Nisramont. I was told to meet the Brigadier in Laroche at 3 p.m. Meanwhile I returned to Lingerie and gave out what orders were possible at this stage.

The scenery between Lingerie and Laroche was the same attractive combination of fir trees and snow at their best in the sunlight. The valley road from Hotton to Laroche is especially lovely. The last part of it is cut into the side of a mountain, with a steep drop to the River Ourthe below it. Here we were held up for some time. An unlucky shell had hit a three-tonner which had set fire to another too close to it, with the result that the road was blocked for an hour.

Laroche is a most attractive town, at least it was before we bombed it silly. It is built on either side of a steep defile. A ruined castle is perched upon a rocky pinnacle in the centre, upon *la roche* presumably.

Brigade H.Q. is functioning in its caravans. I learned that 5th Black Watch are having a sticky time, being held up by the odd machine-guns, tanks and S.P.s on ideal defensive ground. So things are moving rather slowly.

There was nothing for me to do but return to the Battalion at Lingerie and await events. Meanwhile we are settling down for the night.

January 13th.

It has been an unlucky, unpleasant day.

At 0550 hours this morning we were ordered to start at 0630 hours. I jeeped on ahead of the Battalion, with David Scott-Moncrieff and the two signallers in the back. Bob Secretan, our tank squadron commander, was following me in his scout-car. We stopped at Brigade H.Q. in Laroche, where I was given orders to go through Hubermont and occupy Nisramont as quickly as possible. "5th Black Watch are just about in Hubermont now," the B.M. said. So we continued down the road into what soon became very open, snow-covered country.

After three miles I came to the reserve company of the Watch, occupying a large isolated farm on the left of the road. I enquired of the Company Commander whether his battalion was in Hubermont and received a reassuring answer, so asked him to

send the company commanders straight on when they arrived. We soon came to where there was a turning to the left which led to the north end of Hubermont a quarter of a mile away. The south end of this small village was close to the main road, five hundred yards ahead, and I could see the Black Watch there. We turned left and drove into the village, passing a German armoured half-track in front of a house. I assumed it had broken down or run out of petrol. Fifty yards further on we passed another, garaged in a barn. I swung the jeep round, off the road and between two buildings, and Bob lost no time in following me. An old Belgian peasant came out of a house and told us that there were about twenty Huns still in the village and on both sides of our little party, which consisted of three officers, one driver and two signallers. I told Bob to talk to Brigade on his R/T and ask them to tell the Black Watch to hurry up and send a company here. While he was doing so, what did I see but a procession of five jeeps: the four company commanders and the signal officer all driving gaily towards us. We hurriedly pulled them into where we were, which increased our strength by another five officers.

Soon we heard one of the half-tracks coming down the lane towards us. As it passed the side-turning where we stood I put down a stonk with my pistol and everybody else fired madly. We had the satisfaction of knocking off three men who were riding on top of a trailer behind, but the vehicle itself turned left, across an open field and on over the snow towards Nisramont. Soon afterwards the other was driven off in that direction also. Meanwhile the Black Watch were firing wildly at both of them, so wildly in fact that David was shot through the shoulder and in due course departed towards the rear on a stretcher strapped to the top of a jeep.

The country between Hubermont and Nisramont was open and devoid of cover—"Quite like the desert," Hastings remarked. I did not like the look of it one bit.

I chose a building for a command post, and told the company commanders to study the ground while I went back to fetch the Battalion. As quickly as possible I led them into the village, very worried that they would get shelled on the way in, for the whole

of Hubermont is overlooked by Nisramont and the ridge which it stands on. Fortunately the haze, which we have noticed every morning between about 8 a.m. and 11 a.m., was still fairly thick. Nevertheless the last company was spotted and a few shells landed.

Then those of our tanks and S.P. guns which had been able to ascend an icebound hill a mile back started to arrive. Almost before we knew what was happening we had lost three Shermans and one S.P., with an officer (he was going to have been a parson) and two or three men killed and half a dozen wounded. They had been knocked out by Panther or Tiger tanks, shooting from the opposite ridge two thousands yards away. Akers, my young driver, showed the greatest gallantry pulling wounded up through the turret of one of these tanks while they were still under fire.

From now till 7.15 p.m. we had a steady stream of shells and mortar bombs upon the village. It was quite obvious that no attack could be launched from it in daylight, especially since artillery smoke does not work in snow, which has the effect of extinguishing the chemical. About this time the Brigadier arrived at the Black Watch H.Q. at the far end of the village. I sprinted three hundred yards down the lane and sat on some straw beside him. At that moment a shell landed somewhere very close outside. "This is perfectly bloody," he said, and I agreed.

He told me to push on directly it was dark. I ran all the way back and spent the next two or three hours planning the operation. Meanwhile, from our command post window, we could see the stuff continually crashing down on the village, and I was glad that the sandbags which we always carried for just such an emergency were banked across the window-sill. The wireless set was in the jeep outside, with the lead to the microphone coming through the window into the room. While I was speaking on it I heard a sickening crash of glass and wood, but could not look round as the extension was only just long enough to pass under the sandbags. It was a lengthy conversation. When I put down the microphone and earphones and looked round, I was astonished to see Frank Philip, the Battery Commander, as green as an olive,

sitting in a chair with his head and arm bandaged up. He had been hit by pieces of shrapnel which had come through the front door and down the passage. Twice more this afternoon did we have shrapnel flying round inside that room, large pieces which had cut through the single layer of sandbags, and how we only had the one casualty from these three shells is incomprehensible.

Bill MacMillan arrived to say that there had been a direct hit upon his farm across the road. His company had had a dozen casualties from it and were in a pretty poor state. We sat there and talked things over. I thought what a grand chap he is: Bill, in a grey polo sweater above his battledress trousers, with strength of character radiating from him and not a suspicion of excitement or anxiety, although much depended upon him as leading company commander in the forthcoming attack.

From time to time our artillery shot up the woods on the ridge in front of us. At 5.20 p.m. the enemy was still there and sniping at a company of the Black Watch. It was dark by 6 p.m., and soon afterwards George Morrison brought some transport over the hill with a hot meal which did everybody good. The last shelling was at 7.15 p.m., and at 8 p.m. our advance started.

As I stood in the snow at the corner of the lane, watching the two leading companies start, I heard the rumble of tracks moving through our objective, which in fact was the Bosche pulling out. So, though we did so slowly and with caution, we all moved into Nisramont without any more shooting taking place.

January 14th.

This morning, from my bedroom window, I looked out across the snow-fields to Hubermont, and realised once again how hopeless an attack from there would have been in daylight. Yesterday there were two hundred Germans with nine tanks in this village, or so the Belgians say.

We were told to send out strong patrols in various directions to collect any German stragglers. One of these was led by Danny Reid, the second-in-command of D Company, who went off with a platoon. Danny is one of the great characters of this Battalion. Of all our officers he is probably the finest individual fighter and the greatest natural leader. But he likes to pose as being wild

and irresponsible. To-day I told him to go as far as a river two miles away. He left at 9.30 a.m. When he was not back by 3 p.m. I began to be worried and sent two armoured cars to look for him. Almost at once the patrol returned, riding on the top of them. His explanation was that there were no stragglers to be captured by the river, so they crossed it and cleared Ollomont on the far side. Now he had returned with some prisoners and a certificate signed by the burgomaster to the effect that British troops had been the first to enter the village. He thought this was a good exercise for the young soldiers in the platoon. Of course it was a foolish thing to do as Ollomont was an American objective and they might well have put an artillery concentration on it just as Danny and Co. were entering.

From this hill we have had a grandstand view of the American attack: first a bombing programme by waves of Fortresses, then an artillery barrage followed by the advance of their infantry. One of the Fortresses was shot down from a great height. We could see it turning over and over like a falling leaf. Technical-Sergeant Sewell landed by parachute in the Battalion area. An hour or two before he had been at Great Yeldham in Essex, and I gave him a note to take back to friends of mine, whose house overlooks the airfield.

We have just heard that the American divisions attacking from north and south have linked up. So the Battle of the Bulge is now over.

January 15th.

General Rennie came to see us this morning. It is one of his many engaging characteristics always to visit his battalions after a battle. He told us that the adjutant of the Divisional Recce Regiment was killed last night by one of those small, aerial anti-personnel bombs which, by the worst possible luck, landed on a window-sill.

This afternoon I followed the German tank tracks over the snow, to see the positions from which they fired at us. I also examined the hits which had been scored upon the Shermans in Hubermont, while a tank corps officer explained to me in detail how inferior is our design to the Germans': in armament,

armour, periscope design and magnification. The Sherman tank won the battle of El Alamein but became obsolete upon the appearance of the Tiger before the end of that campaign. I cannot understand why the service chiefs and politicians cannot openly admit this instead of issuing reassuring, soothing statements.

We had a party with Bob Secretan and his officers to-night. It was a sad occasion for they are giving up their Shermans, to be converted into a buffalo regiment. We have had this squadron supporting us on most of our operations since Normandy, and could not wish for a better. They look on themselves as being almost Gordon Highlanders.

January 16th.

I went for a walk in the woods to-day and came upon Sergeant B. lighting a wood fire underneath a dead and frozen Hun strung up to the branch of a tree. He was trying to thaw him out, in order to take off his boots. Personally, I have found the army boots quite adequate, but most people seem to think that the type which goes almost up to the knee is warmer.

Whatever controversy there may be about boots, there are no two opinions as to the unsuitability of the kilt for war. Proud as we are to wear one when "walking out," we are thankful that we nowadays fight in trousers. No garment could be more uncomfortable than a kilt for a wet slit-trench in winter.

January 17th.

There has been nothing to do for three days and everybody is still very happy resting.

I greatly miss David Scott-Moncrieff and Bert Brown. David, so charming, so dreamy and artistic, would this afternoon, as in other slack moments, almost certainly have been turning over his postcard collection of old masters or the pages of *The Connoisseur*.

There has been much speculation as to our next destination, and everybody has been praying that it will be in Belgium and not Holland. Now we have heard that it is Turnhout, in Belgium and not far from Antwerp.

January 18th.

We moved to-day. John Frary and I dodged the column and had lunch with Madame Lalou, Christian and Michel on the way. We gathered that life has been very dull there since the gay Gordons left.

It was a long journey and the Battalion did not arrive until well after dark.

January 19th.

Everybody is delighted to be in Turnhout. For the first time we are in a place where the men can go to a cinema or variety show by merely boarding a tram.

January 20th.

Last night I went to Brussels, only about forty miles from here. I had a bath and a haircut and took Livia to a night club. She said that a few pompous officers in 21 Army Group H.Q. had their legs badly pulled when the German threat was at its height. They were told that the underground movement was making preparations to hide them. When they replied that everything was well in hand, the answer they got was: "That is precisely what you said in 1940, and you left us next day!"

January 22nd.

The C.O. got back last night, so I have handed over to him and reverted to my usual obscurity and idleness. What a lot has happened in the ten days he has been away. And how lucky the Division has been to have fought in the Ardennes when we might well have been sitting all that time on the mud-flats of Holland.

Three parts of this campaign are over: France, Holland and Belgium. Now we approach the last and the greatest—Germany!

Part Four

GERMANY

January 23rd.

I WAS VERY SORRY when we left Belgium this morning and moved up to Oisterwijk in Holland. Incidentally it is the first time in the course of our wanderings that we have returned to a previous location. But we are not going to be here very long. I understand that this is only a staging area on the way to Germany. In about a fortnight there is to be a big attack and we are to break through the Siegfried Line. The code name for the forthcoming operation is "Veritable," and it is being run by the Canadian Army with 30 Corps under their command.

January 26th.

For the first time since Veules-les-Roses, and only the second during the campaign, we have a Battalion mess instead of the usual company messes, in a very attractive modern road-house which is much more like a small country club. Last night we had a dance, the partners being nurses from a neighbouring Canadian hospital. They all smelt very nicely of Brussels. It is odd how one just accepts scent at home and hardly notices it. Unfortunately one of the drivers got drunk and wrapped his truck round a tree on the way back from the dance, but nobody was hurt. Corporal Robb says he knows the man well as they both come from Turriff, and he would never have let him have a drink if he could have helped it.

January 27th.

The Corps Commander, General Horrocks, visited us to-day and said how pleased he is to have the Highland Division under his command for Veritable. He is a great man and I think he would now be in Dempsey's shoes. had he not been out of it

for a year while recovering from the wound he received in Sicily. He told us about a Jock in 52nd Division who robbed a German field cashier on Walcheren Island of the equivalent of £1,100. The field cashier complained very indignantly, and said that the man in question could be identified as he held a signed receipt. He produced a grubby bit of paper on which was written: "This bastard had 11,000 guilders. He hasn't got it now."

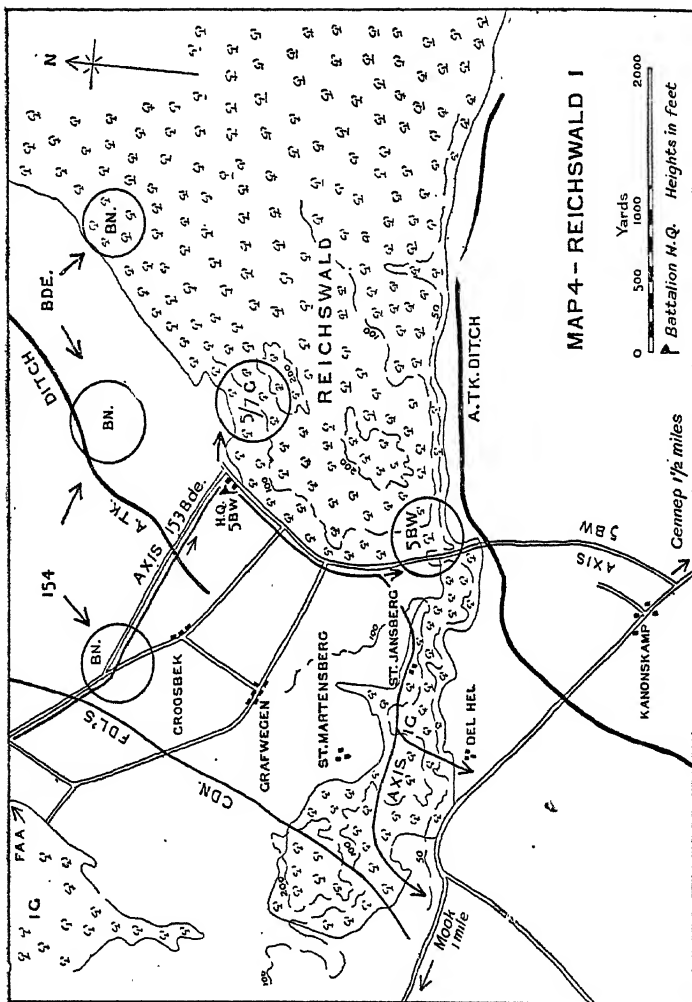
January 30th.

Alec returned from home leave last night and is full of amusing stories about it. He was riding in the usual leave party three-tonner and just before getting to Bourg Léopold, the rail-head, there was a great screeching of horns, and Monty, preceded by several outriders, passed them. Then some one stopped him and said that the Commander-in-Chief wished to speak to him. He went forward, expecting to collect an imperial raspberry for not having pulled into the side of the road more quickly.

"Is that a leave party from the Highland Division?" said the great man. "From the Highland Division? Very well, then I'd like to give them some cigarettes." But the donor had never been thanked for them, for when they opened the parcel they found her letter inside.

January 31st.

It is now certain that the Brigadier, who is home on sick leave, won't be back in time for Veritable, so our C.O., Grant-Peterkin, will be acting Brigade Commander and I shall be commanding the Battalion. In that capacity I went to Division to-day for the Divisional Commander's briefing. It was followed by a most sumptuous, really quite pre-war, lunch. This is a feature of all the General's final conferences before an important operation, and it is always known as the Last Supper.



February 2nd.

TO-DAY I visited the Canadian battalion whose F.D.L.s we pass through when we attack, and had a good look at the ground through my glasses. Except for a few farms and hamlets, it is very flat and open until you reach the Reichswald (State forest). The German frontier runs along the western edge of it. This side of it is Holland but I am told that all the Dutch near the border are pro-German. The only difference between them and the Germans is that you cannot treat them as such; they are vermin, but protected by the game laws.

We have borrowed a charming little summer-house for a map-room. Here we can spread out all the maps, drawings and air-photos for the operation, and in privacy, for of course secrecy before so important an operation is essential, and with most of the Battalion sharing house with the local people, things might well leak out. I have a daily conference in it with the Company Commanders and other key officers, and as a member of the Intelligence Section is always on guard, they can come in at any time to study the air-photos. It is in the grounds of a charming Dutch family and I only wish I had met them sooner. It is such a joy to meet people with the same tastes as myself: travelling, books, golf, bridge and so on. They speak perfect English, French and German, and know these countries well. New definition for a sophisticated foreigner: "One who speaks four languages and doesn't make personal remarks on seeing some one for the first time in a kilt!"

February 3rd.

I like Canadians so much that I am always glad of an excuse to visit them, and I have just come back from the Cameron Highlanders of Canada. They are astride the Mook-Gennep road (*Map 4*) and our job is to take from the rear the Hun positions facing them. They told me that these are very strong as the enemy have had a long time to prepare them. They are therefore so deeply dug-in that no amount of mortar or shellfire affects

them, and there is a good deal of wire and anti-personnel mines. Many of their positions covering this road are dug horizontally into the side of the wooded ridge and so are peculiarly hard to get at. We may find it a tough nut to crack.

February 6th.

We leave here to-morrow for Groot Linden, quite a small village just this side of Mook on the Maas. Zero hour is 1 p.m. the day after.

The day has passed quickly in giving out final orders and in briefing all ranks of the Battalion. Perhaps this is badly expressed for I suppose I haven't really given out any orders at all, and the O Group meeting to-day was merely the last of a series of daily conferences during which each phase of the forthcoming battle has been most informally, and perhaps somewhat facetiously, discussed. Thus I might say: "Next, C Company, if they're not by this time bomb-happy, will pass through A and occupy so and so. How does this suit you, Alec? O.K. That's settled, then."

I am certain that the atmosphere in which battle orders are given out has a great effect upon morale and that the commander should be at pains, by little jokes and a profusion of Christian names, to keep it as light and informal as possible. In the past I have heard commanders say sternly, "Now, gentlemen, I am going to give out my orders," while looking at the same time the very personification of grimness, with the result that everybody left saying to himself: "God, how bloody this is going to be." This is something which I have learned from the Divisional Commander. Thus the General, at a meeting of his commanders before an important operation, would perhaps get up and say: "A lot of tripe has been issued in connection with this party which some people will read and some will not. I, myself, have tried to read it but I haven't understood it all, so perhaps I shall not make myself very clear."

So, when I briefed the Battalion to-day, in two halves in the local cinema, while ensuring that the wall-maps were as good as they could be and that everybody thoroughly understood the narrative, I tried to keep the men amused so that they would

leave the hall in high spirits. We are lucky in that we have had ten days to prepare this operation and, as they have also been briefed at least once by their company and platoon commanders, they should know all about it. In fact, I don't think we have ever been launched into battle so favourably.

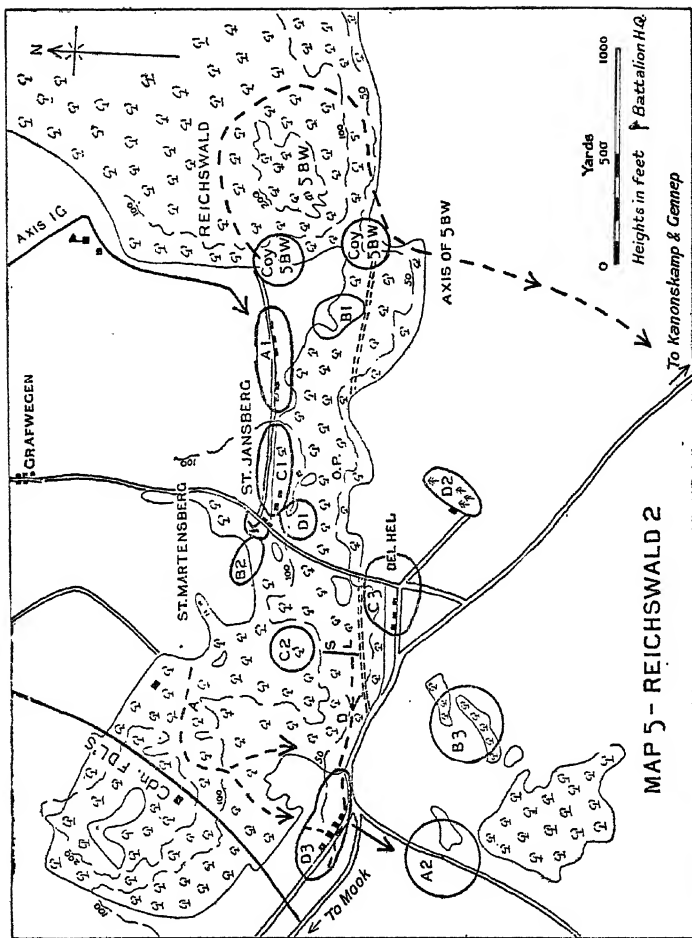
The operation begins at 1 p.m. on February 8th, and the Division is on the right of 30 Corps. The object is to break into Germany through that part of the Siegfried Line which is based on the Reichswald. 154 Brigade move at H-Hour and have to get a footing on the edge of the Reichswald. Our Brigade's task is to pass through them and then turn south and south-west and clear the Mook-Gennep road which, owing to flooding in the north, will probably be the only main road available for a Corps axis. 5th B.W. are to get the high ground at the south-west corner of the Reichswald. When they are there we are to pass through them and then turn west, clear the enemy from the wooded plateau backwards towards the Canadian F.D.L.s and then cut the Mook-Gennep road.

February 7th.

We reached Groot Linden without incident this afternoon. The German wireless has announced that British forces are about to cross the Maas and attack the Reichswald! I am very strung up to-night, wondering what the morrow will bring forth. I have often wondered what exactly influences the state of one's nerves. Sometimes before riding in a 'chase or making a parachute drop or a speech, I have been very much on edge, without actually feeling precisely frightened; at other times, for no apparent reason, I just haven't cared a damn. Perhaps it is something to do with one's liver! Anyway, I'm feeling too restless to write more to-night.

February 8th and 9th.

There were over a thousand guns taking part in the opening barrage and most of them were in our garden. Or so it seemed. At any rate there was a deafening crash at eight o'clock this morning and the jangle of falling glass. I thought: "Heavens, the house has had a direct hit; I wonder who has been wounded."



But it was one of the heavies or super-heavies in the garden just in front of us, and every time it fired great sheets of window-pane came tumbling down. From then on there were times when it was almost impossible to carry on a conversation, so fierce was the gunfire. We have a new weapon called a flying mattress supporting us for the first time. It fires 1,000 rockets in 400 square yards or 400 rockets in 1,000 square yards, I'm not sure which.

We left Groot Linden at 10 a.m. It was a nice morning and I hoped it would remain so. We had a two-mile march to the Mook bridge and were held up by traffic for the best part of two hours 200 yards short of it. I didn't much care for this as I thought the Hun was bound to shell the bridge, the only one within miles, but nothing happened. For a time the confusion was considerable. However, we got moving at last and over the Bailey bridge across the Maas we went, five yards between men and 100 yards between vehicles. I think we all lengthened our stride and crossed our fingers while going over, but all was peace and quiet.

It was another two miles to our assembly area in a wood behind the Canadian F.D.L.s. As soon as the companies got spaced out either side of the track down the centre of it, a truck for each arrived with a meal. I would have liked them to have been better dispersed as one or two shells passed overhead and burst in the wood two or three hundred yards behind. But as there were several other battalions in the wood there was not much elbow room. I walked round the Jocks and noticed how quiet they all were. They hadn't eaten much. I felt much the same and had to force myself to take a second sandwich. There was the usual noise, half whine, half whistle, of a shell coming over and the crash of it exploding in the woods beyond. Murray,¹ my servant, who had been off-colour for some days, came up to me and said:

"Please, Sir, I can't stand it any longer. Can I go back to B Echelon? I just can't stand it."

"Blast you! To hell with you!" I raved at him. "I can't

¹ In one or two instances, of which this is one, the name has been changed in order to conceal an identity.

stand it either, but I'm going to. Get back to your position."

Later in the afternoon the doctor told me that he was definitely a medical case and that he had evacuated him.

I could see that things were going rather slowly, as there was a long delay over launching the Argylls, who were next to us in the wood. So I potted over to Brigade H.Q., which was a few hundred yards away and dug in next to that of 154 Brigade. They told me that 154 had got most of their objectives and 5-7th Gordons had just started, that there was a bit of stuff coming down on the road which was to be our axis, and some trouble from Groosbek to the right of it in the form of one spandau still firing, in spite of the pasting that place had already had. Grant-Peterkin was in tremendous form and I thought to myself what a grand brigadier he will make.

I returned to the Battalion and told them what I had heard: that everything was going well but slowly. It was getting on for 4 p.m. and we had been there for about three hours already. It is not pleasant hanging about waiting to move forward into battle, especially when the road you will have to pass down is being shelled. Then the Black Watch were started. At 4.45 p.m. we were told to be ready to start at 5.30, so it was time to put on our pads.

I was nervous that we should be launched too early and have to hang about on the way forward under fire, while the battalion in front of us was held up. I mentioned it to Grant-Peterkin, yet this is precisely what happened, though it is easy to understand his position with the Divisional Commander at his elbow pressing him to get on and capture the Reichswald. So when we had gone about a mile we came to the tail of the Black Watch, still 800 yards short of the wood. I felt very miserable. There was quite a bit of shelling and hardly cover for a rat, since there was no ditch alongside this third-class road and the few houses had been reduced to little more than rubble. And thus we remained for some four hours, when we might well have stayed where we had spent the afternoon and have had the evening meal as well.

I walked forward a little way and saw rear companies of both

the Black Watch and 5-7th Gordons on the roadside. When I got back it was to find that Frank Philip, the Battery Commander, had established our Tac H.Q. in a small room used for keeping hay and cattle food. Two candles were guttering away on a manger. I told some one to walk back and find the weasel with the 500 self-heating tins of soup and have them issued out. Then, with Ian Edgar, I went forward again.

By this time it was dark. There still seemed to be a good deal of rifle, bren and spandau fire about a thousand yards in front, just inside the Reichswald. We walked up the middle of the road, passing the dark forms of many waiting fighting men, sitting or sprawling at the roadside; many were fast asleep. I heard an officer talking and asked him what the trouble was, but as usual nobody at the back had any notion. All they could tell me was that the formation just in front of them had stopped. So on we went, till a lamp sign just short of the forest bade us turn to the right and soon we came to the Tac H.Q. of 5th Black Watch.

George Dunn was commanding and told me that they had met little resistance, all the shooting being on 5-7th Gordons' front further to the left. His difficulty was that all tracks through the forest were hopelessly blocked by trees, felled both by enemy demolitions and our own shellfire; he had not been able to get a single vehicle into the Reichswald. But the companies were all getting into their positions without any bother. So I decided to go across the open along the edge of the forest; there was nothing to be gained by going round through the Reichswald now that it was too dark to be shot at from afar.

Followed by A and B Company Commanders and a small route-taping party, I went on to have a look. We walked along a very muddy track, with the forest looking black and sinister on our left. By this time the moon was up, and with all the searchlights groping in the sky we felt rather exposed, strolling along there in the open. To the right of us was an open field, completely devoid of cover. We saw dead cattle 300 yards away and I wondered whether any not so dead Huns might not see us. Our direction was parallel to the frontier. We were ten yards inside Germany. At the far end (*Map 5*) we found the two Black

Watch companies digging-in just inside the Reichswald, and they confirmed that all was quiet.

George Morrison and Dennis Aldridge went back, met their companies and led them forward into their positions (*A1 and B1*—see *Map 5*) without incident. B Company's patrol soon brought back a few prisoners from the re-entrant in front of them. Before very long all the companies had reached their objectives along the track leading from St. Jansberg to St. Martensberg (*A 1 to B 2*) and no enemy had been met. It was very dark inside the forest and even Monty's moonlight hardly penetrated through the trees, so we decided to go no further that night and to make the best of it for the three or four hours that were left before dawn. Danny Reid reported that there were a lot of enemy just in front of D Company (*at D 1*).

The first problem next morning was breakfast, complicated by the fact that none of the vehicles could get through the mud and over two Hun trenches to reach us. Two companies eventually went back a mile and fed in the next house to the Black Watch H.Q. A few tanks, which succeeded in reaching us about 9 a.m., carried on top of them cooked breakfasts for the remainder of us. There was a shortage of water and, for the first time in any operation, I did not get a shave.

As soon as they were ready I pushed off the first two companies: B with the dismounted carrier platoon mopping up St. Martensberg and all the enemy positions north and north-east of it as far as Grafwegen, and D to clean up the valley just west of their position. B soon started rolling up the prisoners; they got about 150 in all during their little jaunt. But D got into difficulties, for the Huns were entrenched in the valley, and they came back with the leading platoon commander, Fraser, and one or two men missing. We found their bodies later.

So I put down a sharp shoot (Scale 5 from the regiment of 24 guns: 120 rounds) after registration, and then, with a troop of the tanks firing from the ridge, Danny and D Company had no difficulty in completing the job and collecting some prisoners. Some of our stonks fell rather near B Company, working away on the right. It is necessary to take this sort of job slowly, as

if too many companies are milling about at the same time one cannot use the artillery.

The next company to go was C, and after we had fired the guns on the centre of a network of trenches (C 2) across the valley, they went over and occupied them. There was no difficulty about this; it only took time. C and D Companies, both in excellent spirits, were now parallel to each other and facing south, and their next phase was a two-company attack off the high ground and down on to the plain below, C to take Del Hel and D the copse just east of it (D 2).

I watched this attack from a wonderful O.P. on the hill in front of D Company's first position. Danny Reid had reported that he'd seen about sixty Huns going into it, in addition to those previously there, and all were starting to dig hard. There were no less than nine of us there to witness the slaughter when we turned the 25-pounders and 4.2 mortars on to them before the attack. It was a wonderful sight to see D Company race across the open ground and on to their objective, with enemy mortar fire coming down just too late behind them. From the O.P. we could see the Huns streaming back in little packets into a wood beyond. It was a gunners' dream, but unfortunately there was so much traffic over the air at the time that we could not get through to the guns.

Having seen D Company take their objective, I walked back to the command post in the houses 300 yards behind. There I found a note from the Brigade Commander: "I am sure you are doing everything you can to open the Mook-Gennep road as soon as possible, as it is required for the Corps axis. We want the sappers to be able to work on it as soon as it is dark."

Meanwhile I was beginning to worry about C Company as I had heard a lot of firing, and especially when some stretcher-bearers began to come in with wounded and said that things were not going very well. I was just starting off down the hill when Alec came up on the air to say he had got Del Hel, but that it had been a bit sticky and he'd had some casualties.

When I joined Alec down at the bottom he told me that a young officer of nineteen, whom we had been rather worried

about, had been splendid: he'd apparently made up his mind that he had no chance and might as well die bravely—at any rate, in the face of intense fire and with one or two wounded shrieking with pain, he ran forward, leading his platoon until they had charged in and taken the position. By now our bag of P.O.W. was nearly 300. So far everything had gone according to plan and all the companies to the objectives which had been allotted in the summer-house a week before. But I might have guessed that the luck was soon to break.

Before C and D Companies started their attack, I had sent A Company round right-handed to clean up the enemy strong-point (*D 3*) astride the main road immediately in front of the Cameron Highlanders of Canada. They were allowed two and a half hours for this, and then, at 4.30 p.m., were to cross the road and establish themselves in the copse (*A 2*) just south of it. Simultaneously B Company were to pass through Del Hel and occupy two small woods (*B 3*). A Company have not been in touch with Battalion H.Q. by wireless since D-Day, so I fixed the time for A and B Companies to cross the road before A left. I also sent a field-telephone and line party with A Company.

B Company were delayed and did not put in their attack till 5 p.m. As they entered the north end of their objective, after crossing the road, they came under mortar fire. A few moments later I heard a loud cheer as the company charged through the wood with fixed bayonets. Almost immediately afterwards Chamberlain said: "A Company through by line, Sir." I had had no news of them for nearly three hours and hoped that they had mopped up that strongpoint and were now in their final position. So judge my dismay when Dennis said that his company had failed to take it, that it was very strongly held and protected by mines which had caused him several casualties, and that they had been finally stopped by at least three well-sited spandaus. This gave me a very nasty jolt and I had to do some rapid thinking. I told him that I would attack with another company from due east, along the ridge, as soon as it was dark. Then the line went dead.

I didn't like it at all. But the position simply had to be taken,

I remembered the message I had received an hour before. I knew that both the Divisional and Corps Commanders were waiting for the news that 1st Gordons had opened up the road. Failure was unthinkable. Although D Company had already made three attacks that day, I decided to use them again, with the dismounted carrier platoon in reserve. It seemed to me that the responsibility for this attack was altogether too great for a company commander—even Danny—so I decided to take personal command of it. I told Alec to take over the Battalion. By this time the Black Watch were down in Kanonskamp, so the general situation was good.

Danny Reid and I talked it over and decided to take a start-line (see *Map 5*) running northwards from a German command post which had already been cleared. So we marched round towards it in single file, along a narrow path at the foot of the very steep ridge, with trees on either side of us: Macpherson's platoon in the lead, then Danny and I, then the remainder of the company, followed by Moir and his carrier platoon. Just as we got there we were ambushed. There was a burst of schmeisser in front, and the sharp explosions of one or two German grenades. Immediately five or six Germans came to life in trenches on either side of the path. They must have been asleep, for one-third of us had already passed them. There was an instantaneous crash of automatic fire from the column and every one of them fell, riddled with bullets. It was all over in about two seconds, and our only casualty was Macpherson, slightly wounded in the leg. Actually it was a most efficient performance on our part, but all I thought at the time was: "God, how bloody! Ambushed before we've even started, this is going to be the bloodiest show that's ever been."

We climbed up the face of this steep ridge and the four platoons deployed, two in front with two behind them, facing west and behind the imaginary start-line. But the wood was jungle, so many branches and trees having been felled by our shelling. We might well have been in darkest Africa. Every hundred yards took us about fifteen minutes, and the confusion was indescribable. I found myself scrambling along with Porter, at the head of his platoon, he in front with an automatic very much at the ready,

and me close up, keeping direction with a compass. I knew that Sergeant Matthews' platoon was just behind us; but as to where Danny and Macpherson and the rest of the company was, I hadn't a clue. All we could do was to push on slowly, climbing over tree trunks and branches or crawling under them. "What an awful balls up of this I've made," I thought to myself, having lost all control. "It's all going to be a ghastly failure."

Then we heard some shooting in front, and soon came upon Danny and Macpherson in a clearing. They had taken the first position and had some prisoners. Danny said that the enemy were dug-in round the houses a hundred yards ahead of us. We went forward a little way to see the form. Several spandaus were firing vaguely in our direction and a light mortar was crashing its stuff down on the main road fifty yards to our left. It was fearfully dark among the trees in spite of many flares behind the Canadian lines. Much red tracer was also going up beyond and a fine display of fireworks and distant explosions told me that an air-raid on Mook was taking place. It was a lovely sight, a real Brock's benefit, and for an instant I thought of the Fourth of June and the Eton Boating Song and wished I could forget all about the job in hand. Danny pointed out to me the dark shape which was the nearest house, and it was obvious that the Huns were holding it. I could see the flame from an automatic firing from just below it. Danny, who fears neither God nor man, said:

"It's much too dark. Can't we wait till daylight, when we shall see what we are doing?"

"No, Danny," I said, "it's got to be done now."

"Very good, Sir," he said. "But it's going to be a horrible show."

"I don't care a bit," I replied. "We've got to take this position now, cost what it may. Get all the bren guns up in line. Fire rapid for one minute and make as much noise as possible. I don't believe the sods will put up much of a show, once they realise we are right behind them. As soon as the brens stop firing we'll rush the place."

I leaned against a tree and listened to Danny running the show. The same light mortar kept slamming down close to us on

our left. Everybody was a bit frightened, except perhaps Danny. I heard him moving from platoon to platoon, full of confidence, putting them in position and giving orders. Then the leading platoon moved forward. "Get on, you bastards, what the hell are you doing hanging back on the right?" I heard his loud voice shout.

There was a cheer and bursts of sten and a wild surge forward, and in a moment a shout of "Kamerad" and a column of Huns, seventy-one in number, came running out with their hands up. They said there were no more of them, but I told Danny we must go right through the position as far as the Canadians. The front platoon fanned out and we went forward in the moonlight, climbing over broken walls and piles of rubble interlaced with a honeycomb of trenches. I was afraid that some enthusiast in front might shoot at us, so I passed the word back to the two pipers with Company H.Q. to play the regimental march, and before long we heard the distant strain of "Cock o' the North." I feared that our friends would not hear it, so we went forward shouting "Canadians" at the top of our voices.

It was obvious that there were no more enemy, and soon there was no attempt at military formations or precautions: just a score of men scrambling over the obstacles, in high spirits that the job had been done and a little elated, as everybody always is, by bright moonlight on a perfect night. Danny and Porter were in the lead, walking side by side, and I was perhaps ten yards behind them. We heard the pipers of the Camerons of Canada and knew that we had not far to go. Then there was a loud bang and Danny fell down with a groan.

"Everybody stand still exactly where you are," I shouted, for it was obviously a schu-mine. "Danny, how bad is it?"

I knew it was either a broken ankle or the whole foot blown off—what the doctors call traumatic amputation. Danny's language and Porter, who at great personal risk stepped two or three paces over to him and applied a first field-dressing, told me that it was not too bad. We shouted at the tops of our voices to the Canadians for pioneers with mine-prodders and stretcher-bearers. I looked around and realised now that we were in a narrow no-man's land, only fifty yards wide, between the German

and Canadian positions. Danny, Porter and I were in the middle of a minefield, but fortunately those behind us were still in the old German diggings so I told them to go back.

A Canadian company commander came forward to a wire fence in front and said that the stretcher-bearers would not be long. He told us how pleased he was to see us as they had had seven men killed by snipers during the last week, from the position which we had just cleaned up. Danny was getting restive lying there on the ground, and his language progressively worse.

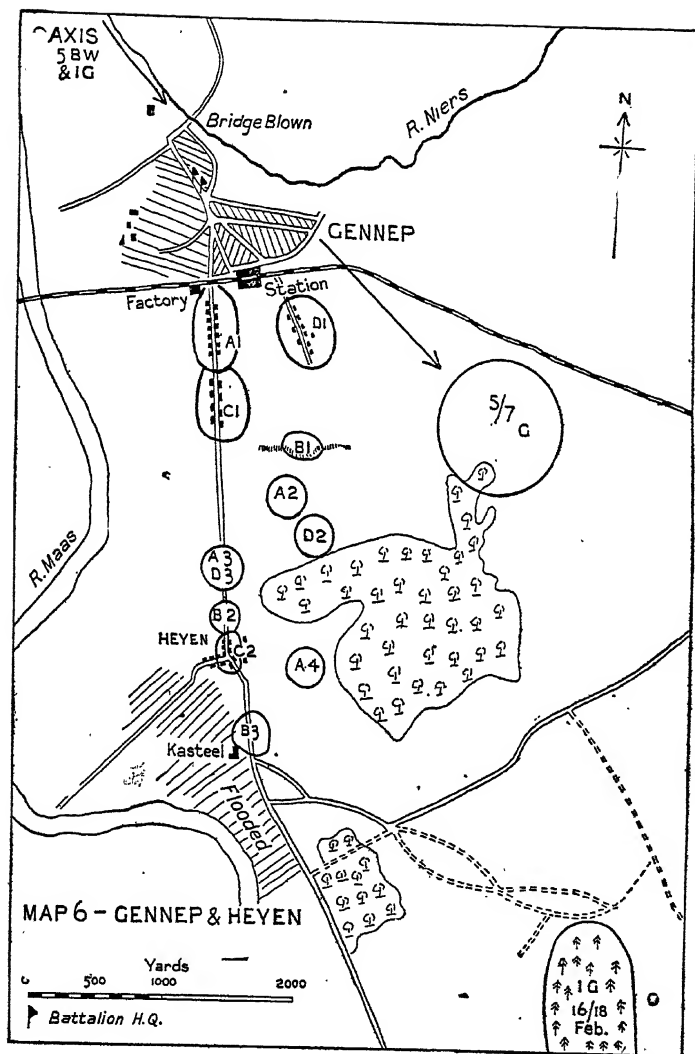
"Never mind, Danny," I shouted. "The moonlight's lovely and I'll get you a bar to your M.C. for this day's work, you mark my words."

But I, too, was becoming impatient for all this time I was standing on one leg—literally, and for about three-quarters of an hour—not daring to put the other to the ground. I don't think I've ever felt quite so foolish in my life. Then the Canadians came bustling up with two or three officers and four or five stretcher-bearers. I thought there was altogether too much bustle. "For God's sake——" I shouted, and there was another loud bang and one of them fell down, badly injured. It now took a long time to get out the two wounded men, with every footstep being prodded first. Danny had ceased to be talkative, and I learned that he had received a lot of wood splinters in the back of the head, as Porter had in the face. When the stretcher party had left, the Canadian pioneer sergeant prodded his way up to me and led me safely out of the minefield by my planting my feet precisely in his footsteps.

By this time Macpherson, who had carried on in spite of his leg wound, had been evacuated, so D had lost all its four officers in the course of the day. I formed up the company and marched them back. I was dead-tired, and felt none of the elation to which I was entitled when I reported to Brigade that the road was now clear.

February 10th.

Yesterday's bag was rather more than 350 prisoners. Our casualties were one officer killed and three wounded, four other



ranks killed and seventeen wounded. I suppose we got off fairly lightly. Sergeant Kelly lost a foot on a schu-mine inside a house, when we were held up behind the Black Watch just after the start. Ronald Davies will take over D. Poor chap, he has only two new officers who arrived this morning. One has been an A.A. gunner all his service, and the other in West Africa for the last four years. This led to an argument with Grant-Peterkin this morning. He told me to cut down from four to three rifle companies, as D would be no use without leaders who knew the men. I said, no, I didn't agree, I had a good opinion of Davies, I preferred four companies for tactical handling, and that I must be allowed to run the Battalion and fight my battles in my own way.

There are no enemy left in this part of the world. All the companies are now in buildings and we are going to have a jolly good sleep. Frank Philip tells me that our gunners fired 830 rounds a gun yesterday.

February 11th.

Last night the Black Watch crossed the River Niers in assault boats, the bridge having been blown, and entered Gennep from the north-west in the early hours of the morning (see *Map 6*). The site for the crossing was well chosen, being a mile from the town itself, so a large measure of surprise was achieved. We were told to cross in the same place and pass through them, in order to clear and occupy the southern part of the town, the area of which the level-crossing is about the centre.

About 10 a.m. I went forward and found Bill Bradford at his Tac H.Q. about 100 yards beyond the bridge in Gennep. Two of his companies were clearing streets just beyond his H.Q., and Bill summed up the situation as "the enemy are fighting well until they are shot at." The third and fourth companies were still between the town and the crossing place in a long trench which had been most conveniently dug by the Huns. On the way back I met a poor whimpering lad who looked no more than sixteen and told me between his sobs in broad Scots that he c'dna stan' it nae mair. So we walked back together with my hand on his shoulder, at least metaphorically speaking.

Our first two companies went through in due course and I

established a Tac H.Q. next door to Bill's, which by this time was on the main street further on in the town. There was a good deal of shelling, particularly on the bridge site, and I felt sorry for the sappers who were trying to build a new one. Then Bill walked into my house, looking very disgusted and indignant, to say that he had just had a direct hit on his H.Q. which had killed his signaller and jeep driver. He also told me that his left-hand company was having trouble and had received about twenty casualties from small-arms fire—spandaus and snipers.

I heard our two companies doing a lot of shooting so I ran up to see what it was all about, dodging from back garden to back garden, and in that way up the street. The leading platoon was crossing the gaps between houses under cover of smoke grenades. Alec Lumsden was very cool and keeping excellent control of his company, never moving more than one platoon at a time. With him he had the commanders of the two following platoons, so that he could show them just where the platoon in front was working and from what point they were required to take on. I was also impressed with the coolness of one or two N.C.O.s who could tell me exactly where it was not safe to loiter and from which houses the shooting was coming.

After talking to Alec and George Morrison, and having judged the strength of the opposition, I decided to take strictly limited objectives astride the main road as far as the level-crossing and to get the four rifle companies firm there; then, after that, to strike outwards and clear up the whole area north of the railway before going further. So we have got ourselves into position there, holding tightly the main street and blocks on either side of it; but there are odd spandau parties roving about in most of the rest of the town and they are in the large factory just across the railway line. C Company is occupying a big yellow milk factory about seventy yards this side of it and they have duels, piat versus bazooka, which break a lot of glass but so far haven't hurt anybody. We shall have to clear all these buildings beyond the railway to-morrow.

Ian has just come in and broken the dreadful news that John Frary, our signal officer, is missing. Apparently they were going to look for one of the companies, John to get a line laid to it and

Ian, as I.O., to find out the situation. They took a wrong turning and saw two men standing in the doorway whom they took to be ours. There was a shout of "Hands up!" and a burst of schmeisser as Ian dodged round the corner. He swears it was aimed at him and not at John and is confident that he is a prisoner. I think this is likely as John's reactions are slow and I am sure that, taken off his guard, he would not think quickly enough to do anything but put up his hands. His poor wife, Anne, will be very worried as they wrote to each other every day, those two. I am very fond of him and shall miss him and his sleepy manner and dry sense of humour. He will be a great loss to the Battalion as he was a most efficient signal officer, and the quiet, brave type.

One of the characters of the Battalion is Lumsden, the Padre's batman. After each action those two search the battlefield and bring in the dead. Lumsden is always very ghoulish about it. Ewen is now on leave and Lumsden has been heard to remark that he is O.C. burials and hopes that the bodies will be brought in and that he will not have to go and look for them.

C.S.M. Morrice made a magnificent remark this morning. When C Company heard that they were going to do an attack to-day one man said he wished to report sick as he was short-sighted. "That will be all right," said the C.S.M. "In future you will always go into action fifty yards ahead of your section so that you will be able to see the enemy."

February 12th.

In the middle of the night I got orders to prepare to take the high ground north-east and east of Heyen, a mile south of Gennepe, and 5-7th Gordons were to attack at the same time on our left and secure the remaining features which overlooked the town. It was quite a complicated little operation and I spent the five remaining hours of the night in my cellar Command Post planning it and the fire programme, and how to get the best inter-communication. Inter-com. is the key to every battle for when it fails all control ceases, and it is particularly difficult since the companies' 18-sets are not good enough. C Company

had a tiring night very much on the alert with the Huns so close in front of them.

We spent most of the morning friggig about, cleaning up the station and odd houses which overlook the railway embankment, our start-line for this attack, with the result that I gave out my orders very late. Then the good Corporal Robb brought in some food which Frank Philip and I proceeded to sit down and eat, although we both knew better. The result was that, by the time we had finished lunch, the fire programme had started, and now we had to make our way to Tac H.Q. for the start of the battle.

We had hardly got outside the door when a shell hit the house above us. I felt the blast on my neck and Frank said: "That's a near one." In the half-mile we had to go we dodged at least twenty more. We just sprinted like hell for fifty yards, then nipped into a house to regain our breath, and so on. I was very annoyed, firstly with myself for having been so stupid, and secondly with our own medium artillery which, as well as the Germans, was shelling us.

We started off with a two-company attack, A and D, to take the two rows of houses immediately beyond the railway line. They had the benefit of a smoke-screen which shielded them from the high ground further south, but also made it difficult to watch their progress, and to some extent hindered the troop of Churchills supporting them. Neither company had any great difficulty, but D lost Frank Hopkins, their second-in-command, on a schu-mine crossing the railway, and Ronald Davies was wounded by wood splinters in his hand at the same time, though he pluckily carried on for the rest of the day.

Then C and B passed through them (*to C 1 and B 1, see Map 6*). B Company was directed on to a small sandy ridge covered with diggings, which they proceeded to charge in their now familiar style and for which they were well supported by the tanks. They claim to have killed twenty Huns and that several more went away wounded and shrieking with pain. So far so easy, and I moved my headquarters up to C Company. I now had to send A, and then D, forward (*to A 2 and D 2*). Then I found that I couldn't get any orders through to D as their wireless was not

working. Finally I sent a tank across to them with a written message.

A and D reached their objectives without any trouble. By this time it was getting dark and raining hard. One S.P. gun was shelling the road between us and the level-crossing, but otherwise all was quiet. I decided to crack on straight down the road instead of moving round left-handed through the woods, which would have been the better plan in daylight. C Company stopped just at the north edge of Heyen. They were held up by a spandau which Alec thought was in the ruined church, but it was too dark to be sure and I had told him not to get involved in a battle. So they made themselves firm round a few houses at the roadside. I have put B Company just behind them and sent them some mortars and anti-tank guns.

We are on all our objectives except one, the hillock (A 4) east of Heyen, and A Company will get there at first light. It is only of value to the enemy in daylight, when it overlooks Gennep.

I had that street in Gennep carefully searched this morning and there was no sign of John's body, so I feel pretty confident that he is a P.O.W. all right.¹

February 14th.

Just as I had closed this diary last night and begun to roll myself up in my blankets upon the one bed in this cellar command post, Alec Lumsden rang up to say that C Company was being attacked from the direction of Heyen.

"Right," I said, "I'll bring down the S.O.S. at once."

Frank was already at his set and needed no telling. In some field three or four miles behind us the eight guns of his battery were already loaded and laid on this fire task. Eight sleepy sentries were standing there, one in each gun-pit, their greatcoat collars turned up, their shoulders rounded, their thoughts far away, but each one ready instantly to pull the lanyard which would fire the shell if the Tannoy loudspeaker crackled and spoke. Similarly at the battery command post, and at the two troop headquarters, sleepy duty officers were sitting there, sipping tea,

¹ Capt. Frary was indeed taken prisoner, and in due course liberated when the Americans overran his camp.

pumping up the Tilley lamp, reading, writing letters, doing their post-war planning, awaiting any sudden call.

"Charlie, peter, queen, one, to charlie, peter, queen, over," said Frank into the microphone.

"Charlie O.K., over," came the instantaneous answer.

"Charlie one to Charlie, sunray here, fire sugar oboe sugar, over," said Frank.

"Charlie, wilco, out," came the reply, so quickly, so quietly, so confidently.

I once saw a film about a submarine. I remember a shot of the commander just before he fired his torpedoes at a German battleship, his nerves and body tense and driving his brain for all he was worth. I suppose I was something like him as I crouched on the edge of a chair, staring at the layout on the map, gnawing my nails and, like a cat about to pounce, watching Frank at his set. I snapped out a few orders. To Thomson, who had taken over Signal Officer that morning: "Tell all stations to open up at once" (in case the telephone went). "Then tell the exchange to clear the line as soon as C Company wants to speak."

To the Adjutant: "Tell B Company to stand to and inform A and D what's happening."

To the I.O.: "Wake Neil, Hastings and Chamberlain and tell them to get into my jeep and open up their sets."

As soon as I heard the battery wilco, which means "your order understood and will be complied with," I ran up the stairs, out at the door, and stood in the open under the stars, listening for the shoot.

"Oh, let it come down," I almost shouted aloud, "let it come down."

Immediately, and less than a minute after Alec had telephoned, I heard away in the distance a faint pop, pop, pop as the guns fired, then nothing at all for five or six seconds, then a faint drone, becoming louder as the first eight shells approached and passed overhead, followed by the bouncing bangs as they came crashing down just beyond the threatened company.

I ran down the stairs and into the cellar and noticed how tense was the atmosphere. Frank was speaking on the telephone

to his F.O.O., enquiring whether he could, with safety, bring the D.F. closer to the company. Everybody else was silent.

Then there was a clatter in the passage and in shambled a breathless corporal.

"No.-14-Platoon-is-surrounded-Sir," he said, as if it were all one word.

He did not quite know why he had run a thousand yards non-stop back to the Battalion Command Post, instead of going to his company H.Q. Somebody, he was rather vague as to whom, had told him to fetch help.

I suppose one must expect this sort of thing to happen occasionally, even in the best battalions.

Then Alec asked for me on the telephone.

"I think it's all now in hand," he said, "it was only a cheeky fighting patrol which fired some sort of phosphorous grenade at the thatch of one of our houses, and then shot at the men when they ran out silhouetted against the flame."

This morning he told us that one German stood in the road shouting: "Come out, you English swine." The platoon commander's servant shot him, and this morning, when they went to get an identification, he was found to be an officer. The pay-book in his breast pocket was drilled neatly through. After this raid the companies all had a somewhat anxious night, a higher proportion than before standing-to in the slit-trenches and in the rain.

In the morning we moved B Company and Tac H.Q. into Heyen, and A to the high ground just east of it. D was brought forward into reserve in the area (D3) now vacated by A Company, and the layout in Heyen was strengthened with a platoon of M.M.G.'s and a section of 17-pounder anti-tank guns. Our patrols reported that there were no enemy in the large wood just east of A Company, but that they were entrenched 300 yards south of the village.

After lunch the acting Brigade Commander came up on the air and told me to come back to a house near the level-crossing where I could talk to him on the telephone.* When I got through to him he told me to be ready to move further south. I pointed out that the troops were very tired, having had only one good

night's sleep in the last four. He then suggested a rather more limited operation and said that it might not come off, but that I should make plans for it. So I stayed on there to work it out. Shortly afterwards Alec spoke to me by R/T and said that an enemy tank had appeared at the edge of the wood about 500 yards from A and B Companies. I replied:

"That's all right, if it comes any further our guns will shoot at it. But I'll get some of our Churchills down."

I then spoke to Grant-Peterkin, who ordered a troop forward, and I went out and stood in the road to brief the troop leader as he passed. Perhaps he had a stomach-ache or had received bad news from home. For the performance of his tanks was the windiest and wettest imaginable. It took them thirty minutes to get jacked up and come five hundred yards to us. I said:

"Go straight down the road. There's plenty of cover. Stop when you reach Heyen, then get out and recce on foot." There followed fifteen minutes R/T conversation with his squadron-leader, who was trying to command the troop from back at Brigade H.Q. It then took the troop twenty minutes to reach Heyen (one mile away) by some circuitous route, by which time it was dark and they had to come home.

Just after the Churchills had started, Alec came up on the air again to say that a second and perhaps a third tank or S.P. gun had appeared near the first and that there was some infantry with them. This, of course, altered the whole situation and astonished me. It seemed unthinkable that the enemy should try to retake Heyen after they had allowed us to walk into it. Moreover, the Battalion had not been counter-attacked since we were in the woods near Escoville last June. I said:

"Right, keep on firing the guns and don't hesitate to bring the D.F. in very close. I will bring forward D Company to C Company's position and also the dismounted carrier platoon." Alec said that there were indications that the enemy were trying to get round our right, so I told him to move one or two platoons of C Company to counter any such threat. Meanwhile the infantry came in with great determination and a few succeeded in getting into the Kasteel (castle) on the right of B Company and only 200 yards from Battalion H.Q. Unfortunately the armour kept

their distance and did not enter the field of fire of any of our anti-tank guns, but Neville Smith, the anti-tank platoon commander, and a crew manhandled a six-pounder into a new position and, with Neville laying the gun, fired four rounds at the nearest S.P. It was not easy to aim at as it kept jinking about behind a haystack, and another spotted the gun's position and fired back. Not until the six-pounder had been knocked out and a large splinter of metal had gone through his tam o' shanter, did Neville stop trying.

I found everybody very much on the *qui vive* at Battalion H.Q. In fact, a rifle pointing through the letter-box, of all places, greeted me at the front door. By this time it was getting quieter, though this was because B Company had temporarily run out of ammunition, as I discovered later. But our mortars were still firing. Between the four of them they fired over 600 rounds, and I think it was their fire more than anything else which broke up the attack and caused the enemy to withdraw. B Company had borne the brunt of the attack, and it was largely due to their Company Commander, George Morrison, that they put up such an excellent showing.

February 15th.

We are resting to-day, and likely to have to go on further to-morrow. The Black Watch are passing through us at the moment.

Sergeant Dunlop and his brother-in-law, Dickson, were both killed during yesterday's attack, by a direct hit from a tank shell on their dug-out. It's very sad as they were both fine chaps, especially Dunlop. He got a M.M. in the desert and deserved a bar to it as he has commanded a platoon in A Company for many actions when we have been short of officers. Incidentally he was due to go home on leave to-morrow.

We have only once before been so short of officers. We started Operation Veritable nine under strength, and casualties since then (one killed, one missing, seven wounded) have now reduced us to seventeen. But I am told that 152 Brigade are worse off still, as they have had some very stiff fighting in the Reichswald against parachute troops.

February 16th.

To-day we have taken over some ground two miles south-east of Heyen from the Recce Regiment, to make more elbow room for 52nd (Lowland) Division, who pass through us to-morrow. There was nothing difficult about it, and we are now dug in among some spruce firs on nice, sandy soil like Camberley Heath. We are now rather counter-attack conscious and I have registered our D.F. tasks, both artillery and mortars. For some months we have been inclined to pay mere lip service to our defensive arrangements.

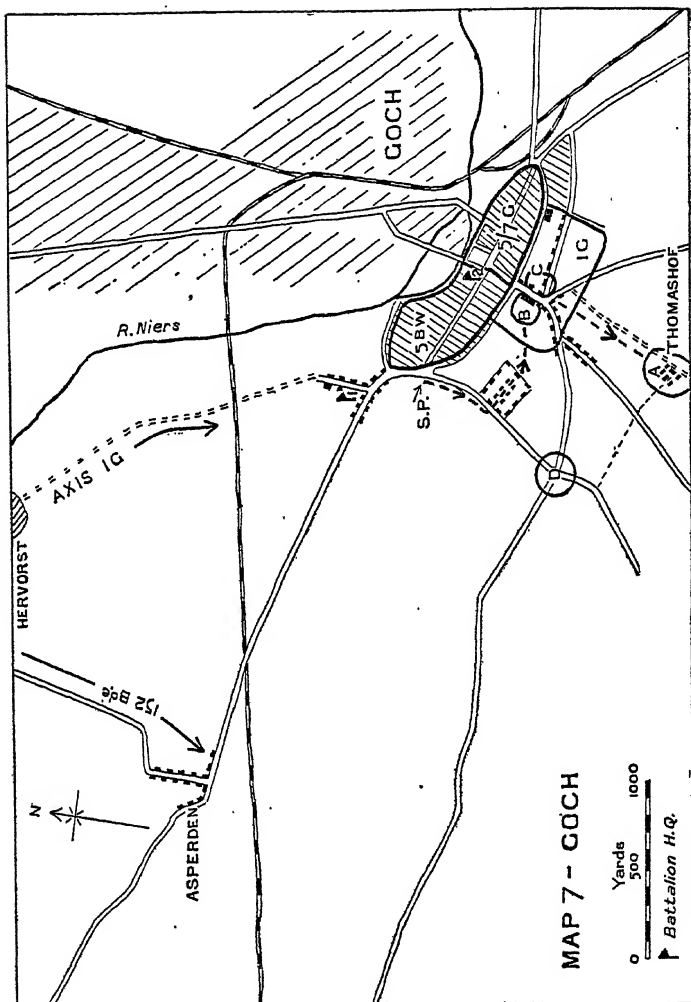
Five new officers arrived to-night. Two of them are brothers, Howitt by name. We now have two Macphersons and also two Thomsons. They are all Scots and all excellent fellows who have been kept at home training others, incredible considering how many lightly-wounded officers are available for this. I am particularly pleased to see Arthur Thomson as his brother was a great friend of mine and was exceedingly gallant in 1940, until he was killed; in fact, those with him said that he deserved a V.C.

February 17th.

52nd Division went through us to-day. They are a magnificent formation with a fine tradition from the last war, but inexperienced, as one can see by the amount of transport they take into battle. First they were a mountain division, then reorganised to be landed by air, and finally brought out here as ordinary infantry some months after the rest of us. C.S.M. Morrice made another good remark to-day, telling his company to get cleaned up before "this new division" came through.

We have now become non-operational, and Cornish, my new servant, has put out my pyjamas, though perhaps they look a little out of place in a command post. He is Danny Reid's old batman and therefore pretty well guaranteed not to go bomb-happy. We have managed to get three companies back into Gennep, which is a bit of luck as it is now raining hard and everybody is under cover.

I hear that four thousand reinforcements were flown out in Dakotas the day before yesterday. At any rate seven more new



officers, making twelve in two days, reported this evening. One is only eighteen. I feel dreadfully sorry for them all.

February 18th.

All to-day has been spent in preparing for to-morrow's operation—the capture of Goch. I am scribbling these notes very late at night in what must have been a coachman's room above the stables of a big schloss called "Grafenthal," at the south-east corner of the Reichswald. The Tac H.Q.'s of both 152 and 153 Brigades are here. Roddy Sinclair, our Brigadier, has just got back, but there is to be no change in commanders till after the battle.

The plan is very simple.

Goch is to be attacked from the north-west (*see Map 7*). 15th Scottish are going for the far side of the river and 153 Brigade the near side. Of 153, 5th B.W. go first and take all the main parts of the town south of the river, up to and including the big square. They should have entered the town at 11 p.m. to-night. Then 5-7th Gordons are to pass through them and take on from beyond the square as far as the railway. Our objective is the area just south of the 5th B.W.-5-7th boundary. This includes the beginning of the main road leading out of the town to the south-west, with two road junctions, and there is a school, a factory and several largish buildings in the area. Air-photos show that the town has been very badly bombed and most of the streets are cratered or choked with rubble.

February 19th and 20th.

The day started with a Brigade L.O. waking me up pretty early to say that 5th B.W. had got into the town without any difficulty, that 5-7th Gordons had been committed, and that my Battalion had been called forward from Gennep and should reach Grafenthal about 9 a.m. This they duly did and the companies and transport were dispersed in the areas we had chosen for them the morning before.

The first two companies in the batting order were A and D, and after about an hour I set off with their Company Commanders, Arthur Thomson and Casey Petrie, and Kenneth

McDonald who has just taken over I.O. There was a lot of mortaring and shelling on the road into Goch and we twice stopped and took cover. There did not seem to be any great hurry, as one could see that the 5th-7th were not getting on very well from the number of their fighting vehicles which were held up at the roadside. We found the Black Watch Tac just inside the town and established our own near it. Akers and Neil were sent out at once to fill sandbags and put them on the sills of the two windows.

Bill Bradford told me that they had no difficulty in getting into the town and occupying the area astride the main road as all the Huns were asleep at the time in cellars. But when they tried to clean up a larger area in daylight, they soon found themselves in difficulties with snipers and spandaus. Companies of 5-7th Gordons were now fighting in what was nominally the 5th B.W. area and had scarcely entered their own objective. It was painfully obvious that first impressions were wrong and the enemy has every intention of defending the town.

The rest of the day was perfectly bloody. It just couldn't have been more unpleasant. As soon as the area of the square had been cleared, I decided to try to clean up the main street running south from it. It was obvious that the other two battalions were fully committed and could not do this, although it was really the boundary between them and should have been done before we arrived.

This street was the main one leading into our objective and A Company got to work. Almost at once their commander, Arthur Thomson, was killed, shot through the head by a sniper in the first few minutes of his first action, while standing in a doorway talking to Bill Kyle, his second-in-command. Kyle took over and did very well, and the company made a certain amount of progress, but resistance stiffened and it was clear that no further advance could be made in that direction without heavy casualties. The street was badly cratered by debris so we could not use tanks or crocodiles, and any sortie by the bulldozer was met by aimed small-arms fire from snipers.

Meanwhile O.C. D Company, with his platoon commanders, tried to find a way across the rubble and fallen houses towards his company's objective—the big building in the north-

east corner of the Battalion area. He soon came up against snipers and one of his officers, Harrison, the eighteen-year-old who joined us only two days before, was hit in the head, though I hear it is only a graze. While this was taking place the troop of tanks was trying to find a side-turning which would take them up to D Company's objective. The leading tank, while still on the main street 100 yards beyond the square, was hit by a bazooka and all the crew became casualties.

It was clear that we couldn't make much progress towards our objective from the direction of the square, so I thought that my best plan was to attack with the other two companies, C and B, through the housing estate to the west. At this time C Company was under cover in the row of houses 200 yards north of the first Battalion Tac H.Q., and D Company was in houses off the main street. Both companies were therefore close to the road junction which was chosen as their start-point. It took one and a half hours to mount this attack, as in addition to the time required for recce, a troop of tanks and a troop of crocodiles were to support it and a smoke-screen had to be laid on to defilade the right flank of the two attacking companies.

The attack was completely successful. C Company first occupied the housing estate, then B passed through them to their objective, the school and buildings round the main road junction. C Company then went through to the buildings beyond. The tanks and crocodiles gave excellent support to this two-company attack; one crocodile went up on a mine at the road junction in B Company's objective. B Company reported that as far as they were concerned, the smoke-screen was most successful, but it did not prevent a very heavy mortar stonk on the housing estate just after they had left it and while C Company were still in possession. C.S.M. Morrice said that it was in his opinion the heaviest single concentration the Battalion had encountered since El Alamein. Nevertheless, the company had no casualties owing to the good cellars of all these houses. Shelling and mortaring has been heavy both yesterday and to-day, certainly the heaviest shelling the Battalion has had since D-Day, and only the excellent cellars, which seem to be a feature of all German houses, have saved us from having very heavy casualties.

While this attack was taking place, the Brigadier, who by this time had resumed command, told me that he wanted us to send a company to the cross-roads (D) south-west of the housing estate, and another to Thomashof, a very large farm with many outbuildings. I said that I would do so before first light next morning; we both agreed that, with this heavy mortaring, it was necessary to get across the open ground under cover of darkness. With this extra commitment, it was obviously not feasible to take all the buildings within the Battalion's original objective, so I told George Morrison and Alec Lumsden that B and C were to hold only the main street down to the road junction and such houses just east as could be conveniently occupied.

D Company hadn't done much, so I told Casey that they would have to go to the cross-roads. I had no worries about this, as old Casey is a thoroughly experienced officer and the Divisional Recce Regiment had been almost as far in the afternoon and reported that they thought the area was unoccupied. Except for making him conform to our timings, I gave Casey a completely free hand.

I could not take B or C for Thomashof as they had borne the brunt all day, and Alec Lumsden and George Morrison had both done so much already. That left only A Company. But I wasn't at all happy about sending A Company off into the blue on this night attack. Bill Kyle is a stout-hearted lad, but not very experienced. That morning he had had the unnerving experience of seeing his company commander killed while talking to him. There was only one other officer left in the company, Charlie Howitt, whose first action it had been. And one of the three platoons was commanded by only a corporal.

I gave a lot of thought to it during the evening and finally decided to command the company myself. I asked Kyle if he minded, and he seemed quite pleased. In a way I was rather glad to have this opportunity, which I regarded as an act of self-discipline. Of late I have been finding it increasingly difficult to leave the nice, safe command post when there has been shelling.

Nothing was known about Thomashof except what I could learn from the air-photos. From these I saw that our objective

consisted of one very large building with five biggish outhouses round it. In addition there were two smaller houses detached from and about a hundred yards our side of the main group. Several enemy trenches could be seen.

I made the simplest plan possible. The medium artillery would shell Thomashof during the night, scale five from sixteen guns—eighty rounds, each a 100 lbs. We would take the shortest route from the cemetery just in front of B Company, who would be responsible for patrolling this area to secure our start-point. The I.O. would lay out white tape for the first 200 yards, after which it was 1,100 yards by compass across open country. Corporal Henderson's platoon would take the first two houses, then Howitt's platoon would go for the main building, and Sergeant Cleveland's platoon and Company H.Q. for the two nearest outhouses. Zero hour was set for 4.45 a.m., but I afterwards postponed it till 5.45, which I thought would get us across the open ground in darkness but give us the benefit of first light to clear the somewhat alarmingly large buildings. I had the two officers and all the N.C.O.s in the Battalion Command Post and took great trouble in briefing them, and they all had a good look at the air-photos.

I sent a note to the Brigade Commander explaining the shortage of officers and N.C.O.s in A Company, and that for this reason I felt I should take command of this company night attack, and therefore could Grant-Peterkin come up during the night and take over his Battalion. Later the Brigade I.O. came up and said that the C.O. was in bed with a bad cold, so I told Alec to come and take charge from 4 a.m.

It had been arranged that I should join A Company at 5.40. About half an hour before that I came up from our cellar and stood on the pile of rubble outside, to take stock of the night: the brightness of the moonlight; the effectiveness of the search-lights; the strength and direction of the wind; the amount of enemy shelling and mortaring (still considerable), etc. I heard a lot of heavy stuff crumping down in the direction of Thomashof, so I told our medium representative to stop his guns firing. Just before I left the command post he told me that they had not fired since 4 a.m.

I went round the corner and joined A Company just as it was falling in. But the same heavy-calibre shells could still be heard crashing down ahead, and in the stillness of the night the loud resounding bangs were undeniably somewhat frightening. I walked a few yards ahead to a clearing, and then took a compass bearing on where I heard the guns firing. When I plotted it on my map I saw that it was from the south-east corner of the Reichswald, just where I knew the Scottish Horse, the Divisional Medium Regiment, was in action. So I told Kyle to get the company back under cover and ran up the street to B Company's H.Q. to speak to Alec on the telephone. I told him that there was no shadow of doubt that it was our guns firing, and I gave him the bearing I had just taken. Alec replied that he had just told the gunners that all the guns in Second Army were to cease fire. So I ran back to A Company. Hitherto there had been odd shells dropping about the place, all fairly close, but as I was on my way back, an imperial stonk came down all round. Cornish, my servant, and I dived into a house just in time.

A few minutes later, when all was quiet again, I emerged into the street, dusty and sweating, and began to look for Kyle. Then I heard those same guns crumping their stuff down once more along our route. Each explosion sounded like the crack of doom as it resounded and echoed all round in the darkness.

For an instant I considered cancelling the attack. Then I told Kyle to form up the Company. We had already lost a quarter of an hour, and it was about 6 a.m. when we moved off: Corporal Henderson's platoon with Kyle responsible for the compass course, then myself with Howitt and his platoon, then Sergeant Cleveland's platoon, then Company H.Q. After going about 200 yards there was a salvo of mortar bombs and the column checked. After half a minute I went forward and found nobody ahead of us, and cursed the leading men for not having followed those in front. Then we found McDonald, the I.O., very cool and confident, and he walked with me to where the tape ended.

It was a lovely clear night with visibility a good 200 yards—rather too much for the job in hand, I thought. It was pleasant to be in open country after the dirt, dust and shelling in ruined

Goch. Except for the column of silent men and a house burning away on my right, I might have been going to an early morning duck flight. Then there was another loud crump ahead, and I realised that although the gun in question was firing from the direction of the enemy, there was a remarkable echo coming back from the Reichswald, and this it was which had made me take a bearing to what appeared to be the position of our own artillery. Luckily that was a parting shot, and those particular guns fired no more.

All went well for a time, and the leading platoon had no difficulty in taking the right hand of the first two houses. I then ordered Howitt's and Sergeant Cleveland's platoons forward. It was just getting light, though it was too dark to distinguish friend from foe at twenty yards. One spandau was firing from 200 yards away, but not apparently at us. We seemed to have achieved surprise.

With Kyle and Company H.Q. I followed Sergeant Cleveland's platoon through an orchard, across a stream and up to the two nearest of the main buildings. Sergeant Cleveland's platoon entered the left-hand one, and we the right. Ours consisted of a large cattle byre with about six smaller rooms leading off it. By now there was a certain amount of firing taking place, for in several directions the enemy appeared to have come to life. It was still pretty dark and I was afraid of us shooting each other. I paired off the men with us and posted two at each of the four doors of the byre.

Kyle went outside for a moment, and when he returned he was shot at by his servant at five yards' range, and missed. Then there was a burst of fire from one of the men in a doorway behind me.

"You bloody fool," I shouted at him, as some one fell in the straw at his feet, gasping, groaning and choking his life away. But this time it was a full-blooded Hun, though unarmed and half-dressed.

I went to the window to read the battle. There seemed to be hardly any shooting taking place. It was clear that Howitt's platoon had not taken the main building for there was not a sound from there nor any sign of them in front.

I went across to Sergeant Cleveland's platoon next door. He told me that when anybody tried to cross to the next building they were fired on by two spandaus from dug-in positions in the garden behind. It seemed to me that the Company was not in any particular danger as the buildings they were occupying were substantial and the enemy were not showing any aggressiveness. But it was obvious that more men would be necessary to clear the remaining buildings. We were not through to the Battalion by either R/T or line so, after consulting Kyle, I decided to return and send up another company and some tanks.

On the way back I found that though Corporal Henderson's platoon had still got the first house, they were not yet in the second one, which was held by the enemy. Corporal Henderson was firing a piat at it somewhat ineffectively. I told him to use his smoke and rush the house, and then take the whole platoon across and join up with Kyle.

Cornish and I then had a very nasty time getting back over the open ground as it was light enough to be seen, and two spandaus fired at us. We ran like mad, taking it in short rushes from cover to cover. Luckily there were one or two small bomb craters in the largest field, without which I do not think we could have got across. As an additional insult somebody fired one shot from an anti-tank gun at us.

Unfortunately, for one reason or another, it took about two hours to get B Company off with some tanks and crocodiles. Just before they started one or two men from A Company came in to say that the company had been overwhelmed and they were the sole survivors.

Even with the armour to support them, B Company had quite a difficult time and some ten men killed in capturing Thomashof. They took about eighty prisoners. George Morrison, as usual, was exceedingly brave in what was a very nasty attack. He is very sick about the support given him by the crocodiles, only one of which would cross the open ground with his company. One of the new officers, Ventris, also did well, being wounded five times in the course of the battle and only giving up when George ordered him to do so. He had been with us only four days. "It was fun while it lasted," he said, as they took him away on a

stretcher. I had made Alec and George toss up as to which company should do this attack. George lost, so Alec insisted in accompanying him to give him his moral support for the first part of the attack. What magnificent chaps those two are!

From one or two survivors and a stretcher-bearer who was taken prisoner and escaped, it seems that Howitt's platoon reached the front of their building and saw one or two men in the doorway. Thinking (God knows why) that it might have been some of the rest of the company, they challenged them, and the reply was a burst of fire. Howitt was killed—we found his body to-night—then the rest of the platoon scattered. The enemy was very strong and shortly afterwards put in several attacks, and the company was overwhelmed through lack of leaders. No doubt parachute troops or commandos would have made short work of the Huns in Thomashof, but our experience is that once the leaders get hit, the attack pegs out. Anyway, they fought well as we found eight or ten dead, and no doubt a number of the forty-three that are missing are wounded. I saw very little sign of damage done by our medium artillery. God knows what they were firing at.

I am feeling utterly exhausted, and depressed beyond words, as I think that the A Company disaster to-day was my fault. Firstly, I could have asked for a Typhoon attack on Thomashof yesterday afternoon, and secondly I should have insisted that the place was too big to attack with one company, which was all we had available while still having to hold part of Goch.

February 21st.

I was up very early this morning and went round the companies, getting shot at for my pains by a spandau merchant a hundred yards from the square, in a street which was clear yesterday. It's about time 5-7th Gordons did their job and cleaned up their area properly.

George Morrison and B Company are very tired. D is in much the same state; their little cross-roads is a shambles; most of the houses are burnt out, and two recce cars and a carrier have blown up there on mines. The shelling and mortaring since we

have been in Goch has been pretty well non-stop, and we have all had some near shaves. One landed very close to Cornish and me as we were on our way back to breakfast after visiting D Company. There was a great yellow flash, a powerful blast and smell of cordite, and we dived down the cellar of the house we were passing; not until some minutes later did I discover that I've got a small splinter in my finger.

After breakfast Alec rang up to say that Ian Edgar and three of his platoon H.Q. have been killed and two more wounded, by a shell which landed on a cellar window-sill. Sergeant Coutts, the carrier-platoon sergeant since Alamein, was also killed when standing in a doorway this evening.

February 22nd.

Several more narrow shaves to-day. They wear one down in the end. Six months ago I found them slightly exhilarating, just as when one has ridden in a number of steeplechases without a mishap, it does one's nerve good to have a harmless fall. But now I have seen too much and have too great a respect for the law of averages. The shelling here has certainly been prodigious. Last night two new officers got hit on their way up to join their companies. I hadn't met them and now I probably never shall.

I am spending the day with George at Thomashof, to give him a chance of resting. It's a beastly place. We have been shelled, mortared and minnied all day, and the M.G. platoon has had twelve casualties out of fifteen men, from one unlucky shell, though of course they shouldn't all have been in one room. We had to lay on a proper little operation with a smoke-screen and artillery programme to get them back, as there is a spandau which covers the road corner so that a vehicle cannot come up here in daylight. Yesterday it deliberately fired at an unmistakable ambulance which contained twelve wounded, a good show as they were all Germans. George has been telling us about one of his sergeants, Strahan by name and a brave chap. They approached a dead German officer. "Steady, Sir," says Strahan, "he may be booby-trapped." George instinctively takes a pace back, whereupon Strahan removes the watch, fountain pen and Luger pistol. (Lugers are highly prized as they are sold for

£10 to Americans.) He has since been wounded and the doctor says that when he reached the R.A.P. he could hardly feel his pulse for wrist-watches.

That revolting chap Lumsden has been more ghoulish than ever lately. Thus a few days ago he said:

"I hear that there are two gone in B Company already. I'd better start digging at once." And later, "I can't find one of the arms, but anyway I've got enough to fill the grave."

Ewen has just held a most dramatic burial service for those who were killed round Thomashof. Two long graves, one full of Gordons and the other full of Germans, and Ewen standing on the mound of earth, silhouetted against a burning farmhouse, in battledress with a white padre's collar and a steel helmet in his hand. A small group of us stood in front, listening for the whistle of shells and ready to dart back inside the building at any moment. I am very upset that little Chamberlain, who has for so long been my signaller, was amongst those just buried. As I couldn't use my jeep he was sent down with A Company's line party, and killed. He was such a nice chap and always had a ready smile for me.

We stood-to at dusk and there was a rattle of musketry. I thought: heavens, we are being counter-attacked; but it was only a pig being killed. And to-night we have had pike for supper, killed by a tommy-gun in the lake at Grafenthal.

Yesterday we were bombed once again by the R.A.F. in broad daylight and perfect visibility. The whole of one stick fell in Goch. The C.R.E. was hit in the head and is not expected to live, and the Argylls had about a dozen casualties. We were lucky to escape without any as one bomb fell in C Company's area and burnt out all their transport. Whenever we are bombed by our own people we get furious and say that it's sheer carelessness. It may or may not be, but at any rate there's no doubt at all about the deep debt of gratitude the Army owes the R.A.F. Throughout this campaign the enemy has had no Air Force to harass us and has always been short of artillery and mortar ammunition. This has been due to our bombing of their factories and supply lines, and it has saved many, many soldiers' lives.

5th B.W. went through to-day and 5-7th do so to-night, so things will soon loosen up.

Our casualties for these four operations—Reichswald, Gennep, Heyen and Goch—are:

	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Total</i>
Officers	4	14	2	20
O.R.s	29	106	48	183
				<hr/> 203 <hr/>

February 27th.

I've just got back from two days' rest in Brussels. Thank goodness they have now stopped shelling Goch.

I shared a room at the Palace with Spens, Argylls, of 227 Brigade in 15th Scottish Division. He praised 6th Guards Tank Brigade which support them and said how they will go anywhere, even through woods by moonlight. I wish we had them with us. Exercise Blanket was in full swing. This was a check up on every one in uniform in Brussels, to rope in the deserters. They even inspected the kits of all officers in transit, on the look-out for loot or black market. Unfortunately I'd left my pass behind, but heard about the exercise in time and got another from a friend at S.H.A.E.F. H.Q.

I went to the Cerf in the evening, where champagne cocktails cost only fifty francs. There I met a squadron-leader in the R.A.F. "So you are in the 51st Division," he said, looking at HD on my arm. "I hear you are not prepared to advance any further unless you are guaranteed *no* air support."

February 28th.

We seem to be staying a week in Goch, and are now cleaning up and starting a little mild training—street fighting, an exercise with the tanks, etc. We are still nearly all living in cellars as all rooms above ground are so knocked about.

It's difficult to find out how the American attack to the south is getting on.

March 2nd.

THERE IS a great shortage of N.C.O.'s in the Battalion. We now have officers and men for four rifle companies once more, but N.C.O.'s for only three. That they have made the Division up to strength again so soon with both officers and men shows that it is known already that there are more bloody battles ahead of us. These last reinforcements, coming so soon, have a significance which is apparent to every one.

March 3rd.

We have always read in the papers that the Germans are almost at starvation level and that most of their possessions are *ersatz*. There is certainly no evidence of this in Goch: on the contrary there is every sign of plenty. The cellars are full of bottled fruit and vegetables, literally hundreds of jars, and the farmyards show no shortage of stock, poultry and feeding stuffs. The linen cupboards and pantries here would be the envy of any British housewife, and such Germans as are now beginning to appear have good clothing and shoes. In fact they seem to be at least as well supplied with everything as people are at home. The effect of all this on the troops is once more to undermine their confidence in the Press, the B.B.C. and any Government statement—all of which they will be even more ready than before to dub as "propaganda."

On the subject of the Press it is very annoying that all the papers refer to these last battles as having been fought by the Canadian Army; even the most reputable papers have said that the Second Army is being held in reserve—no mention that in fact more than half the Second Army has been engaged, having been placed under the command of the Canadian Army for the operation. Of course this is not the fault of the journalists but of the Army Public Relations Department. But it annoys the men, and no wonder. The stupidity of the Army over news censorship still passes belief. It is well-known how we left America

to think that all the fighting in M.E. was being done by Dominion troops and Indians—so little mention for so long of British formations. How much morale in the Army would go up if they would release unit names and how bucked our Jocks would be to see "1st Gordons" in print once a month or so. They would cut it out and keep the cuttings, and what a difference it would make to a unit!

Danny Reid was wounded the day after Murray became bomb-happy, so I took on his servant, Cornish. He suits me admirably. Most men refer to the Germans half-affectionately as Jerry and are only too ready to give them a cup of tea as soon as they surrender. Not so Cornish, and I have seen him take a cigarette out of the mouth of one of them and stamp it underfoot. Like me he would skin them alive or boil them in oil without any compunction whatever. When I asked him whether he would like to be servant to me, he replied that he would but that he couldn't do any of this lady's-maiding (and, what's more, he wasn't going to, his voice implied). Nevertheless, when there are no women to do it he washes my underclothing and darns my socks as well as any of them. He told me that I am the fifth officer he has had during the campaign, the others all having been killed or wounded.

March 4th.

We were talking about our General, Thomas Rennie, last night and saying what a lot the Division owes to him. We did not have a particularly good reputation when he took us over last July, but now it stands pretty high.

The Americans are getting on wonderfully, but I fear Rundstedt will get most of his stuff across the Rhine, like he did over the Seine. It is raining to-day, just when we want the Air Forces up. We ought to be crossing to-morrow, but I am afraid it will not be for another month, which will give the enemy plenty of time to organise a reception for us.

We had a visit from Winston to-day, and are very proud that we are the only Division he has spoken to. He looked very well and as pugnacious as usual. Monty (in a green sniper's jacket) accompanied him, and all the big shots. He came to a Divisional

Retreat, the massed Pipes and Drums. It started with the Last Post and "Flowers of the Forest," that haunting piper's lament, in memory of those who have fallen since the start of the campaign. I thought of some of the Gordon officers: David Martin, Albert Brown, Murray Reekie, Johnnie Grant, Arthur Thomson, George Stewart, magnificent chaps every one of them and what a loss to the nation!

I remember officers in England saying how quickly in war you recover from the death of a comrade. I suppose this is true in a way, since though you may lose half the officers of a battalion in one day, others take their place and the machinery still goes on. But I for one can never forget these good fellows. All my closest friends seem to have been killed in this beastly war: Dan Godfrey, one of my two companions for seven months over the Greenland ice-cap, killed in action in 1942; Roger Pettiward (we were mutual godfathers to each other's children), killed with No. 4 Commando at Dieppe; John Rock, killed in an experimental glider flight—we shared an office and a cottage for fourteen months; and Sandy Cuninghame, my greatest friend at Sandhurst and in the regiment—killed commanding a Scots Fusilier battalion in Normandy last July, the day before his D.S.O. came through.

Unfortunately Winston arrived one and a half hours late and we were standing in a drizzle until then. We had been told to cheer when he left but there was not a murmur from the Jocks. They think the world of Winnie but they are independent and undemonstrative at the best of times, and they just weren't feeling like cheering.

I am having a little trouble with my finger—there's some metal or grit in it. Something went through it, just a tiny piece as pointed as a needle. Odd that a great big thing like a shell can splinter so small.

March 6th.

"Going back for training." I am glad to be seeing the last of this cellar and, for the moment, of Germany.

This morning I took a stroll up to the cemetery. The rapid deterioration of the German situation could be seen in their

graves. Firstly, an elaborate stone memorial to the men of 190 Infantry Division who fell in 1940. Then well-made black and white wooden crosses for the dead of October, 1944. But for those who were killed after October the crosses became more and more crude; latterly there was neither paint nor crosses but just any old piece of wood sticking up in the ground with a name written on it in pencil. Finally, mass graves dug with a mechanical excavator and no identification at all.

The German crosses are Maltese in shape. On the upright below the cross is the man's name, then underneath it his rank and regiment, home town, date of birth and death, and below that sometimes where he was killed. "Thus Gerhard Lorengen, Pionier 3 Pl, Ers Bte 20, aus Dresden, geb. 11-8-20, gef. 9-10-44;" or "Wilhelm Loch, Gefr 1-Füs t B 26, aus Leipzig, geb. 22-4-18, gef. 21-10-44 bei Grafwegen." Sometimes you see the signs Y for born and A for dead.

I found the grave of a British officer who, I imagine, died of wounds in the Goch hospital. The cross said: "Englander Lt. John Johnstone, geb 15-10-18, gef 5-2-45. E.M. Army—Nr 4273599 Recce R.A.C." Beside him were buried two Canadians, "Canadien Cpl Zak Zaharik" and "Canadien Pte Pick." As the dates on all three crosses were just before Operation Veritable, I think they must have been killed or wounded on patrols.

There were also the graves of a lot of civilians, mostly railway and party officials and their families, no doubt killed in the bombing. Thus: "S.A. Rottenführer Valentin Freece," "Zugwachtmstr Adolf Haarhaus geb 1883," "Frau Stubs-wachtmeister Oscar Hoffmeiss." Likvornik told me afterwards that in the German railways they have ranks and uniforms just as in the Army.

March 7th.

We have reached our new area on the Belgian-Dutch border. The companies are in Neeritter and two other Dutch villages. Battalion H.Q. is in an old moated house, something between an extra big farm and a chateau. The walls are whitewashed both inside and outside, and though only 200 yards from Neeritter, it is just over the Belgian border. The difference between Holland and Belgium is noticeable, though it may be across the breadth of

only one field: in Holland you have well-built and scrupulously clean houses and usually dull, heavy women; in Belgium untidy and unattractive houses but the women are usually good-looking. We took over from a R.E. squadron in 7th Armoured Division. They told us they were not very popular when they arrived, as the Americans who had come here first had misread their maps and thought they were in Germany, and had been rude to the locals. They also said that the banks of the Maas, across which we are going to rehearse our crossing of the Rhine, are heavily mined.

Two of our former officers have returned. Bruce Rae, who was wounded for the third time in November, with a nasty scar on his jaw, and Bill McFarlan. Bill's right hand is paralysed and he's also lame. He wangled his way out here by getting posted to our Battle School at Louvain, but when he landed at Ostend they saw his medical category was B and said he could go no further. So he just hopped on a lorry and reported here.

March 8th.

We are now getting down in earnest to planning and training for the Rhine crossing. I have often wished I had taken part in the historic D-Day landings, but I suppose the odds are that if I had not missed the first month of the campaign I should not have got through till now, and this forthcoming operation, to be called Plunder, promises to be the next most important and interesting. The initial assault crossing is to be made by the two Scottish divisions, ourselves and the 15th, and it is a great honour. I believe Monty is supposed to have said that Scottish troops are best for assaulting.

To-day we had a lecture on the organisation for a big river crossing. It boils down to one regiment (the Royals) controlling the whole thing. They have posts in the marshalling, loading and dispersal areas, on the near and far bank and so on, using the wireless in their armoured cars to call forward the infantry when there is room for them at each successive stage.

My job in this party is in the loading area—to supervise the loading of the companies and later the vehicles into the buffaloes. A buffalo is a big tracked amphibious vehicle about the size of a

tank, which lets down at the back like the beach landing craft used on D-Day. It crawls down the bank and into the water and then its tracks drive it across to the far bank, when it noses its way out again. I must confess I am not exactly looking forward to it. It is necessary to load vehicles from a hard road with a turn-round, so it means hanging about at a road junction for many hours in presumably a good deal of shelling and mortaring. I'd far rather cross with the companies and fight the battle on the other side.

We all feel we ought to be crossing now and not in a fortnight's time. No doubt there is a lot of community digging and mine-laying taking place on the other side, and to this extent every day that passes is a day lost. However, I know in my heart that the Army Commander knows best. To mount an operation of this size is bound to take a lot of time. The ammunition build-up alone is a tremendous problem.

With the shortage of experienced platoon commanders and N.C.O.s our minor tactics are by now so minor as to be almost non-existent, so we must have something to compensate, which, as usual, is overwhelming artillery support. We are still awfully short of N.C.O.s—A Company, now reformed, have only five.

March 9th.

I was woken in the night by a signaller with a message pad. I think I must have been dreaming that I was commanding the Battalion in a battle, because I woke with the fixation that this was an order to attack at short notice. But instead it read: "30 Corps to 1 Gordons. Personal from General Horrocks to Major Lindsay. Congratulations on well-deserved award of D.S.O." Of course, I was astonished. It is about two years since anything really nice has happened to me. In the next hour I turned on my torch several times just to make sure I'd made no mistake. Then I gave up trying to sleep and got up and wrote and told Joyce all about it.

March 11th.

Yesterday I felt badly in need of a bath and a haircut, so ran down to Brussels after lunch—seventy miles. I clicked for a

party with Livia and some Belgians, where I dropped a monumental brick. Some one started talking about conditions in Germany and I was asked if I'd seen any signs of food shortage. I told them all about the preserved fruit in the cellars in my fluent but execrable French and used, I don't know why, the word "preservatif" for preserves. Half those present started talking all together and the other half shook with laughter. Later I asked Livia what a "preservatif" is. "*Un petit manteau pour quand il pleut,*" was her reply.

March 13th.

We still haven't had the first river-crossing rehearsal. The delay is due to the time it is taking the sappers to clear the banks of mines.

To-day we had a regimental reunion. It started with a football match and then Retreat played by the massed pipe bands of the 1st, 2nd and 5-7th Gordon battalions. All the special Gordon tunes: "Marquess of Huntly," "Captain Towse, V.C.," "My Highland Home" and "The Cradle Song." "Just the job for Unter den Linden," as I heard a spectator from an English regiment remark. The pipe corporal of 2nd Gordons was pointed out to me as being the son of Pipe-Major Lauder, a famous Gordon V.C. of the last war. As well as the officers of the three battalions, there were two Gordon Brigadiers there, Eddie Colville and Roddy Sinclair. After tea we danced reels, and the timbers of the old moated house shook till I feared they might give way.

I hear that 5th K.O.S.B. have only two pipers left, through taking them into battle.

March 14th.

President of a court martial all morning. The usual cases of desertion from the field of battle. We gave two ten years, two five years and one twelve months. You know that when you award a ten-year sentence it will be reduced to three or four and that the man will serve perhaps six months. So if you think a man should get, say, four or six years, you pass a sentence of ten or fifteen respectively.

George Forbes is back from his signal course and Gray is also back, one of our few wounded officers to return to us. We can never make out why we so seldom seem to get wounded officers and N.C.O.s back, and feel it must be another short-coming in the Adjutant-General's department. Gray has grown a moustache; he says he's matured a lot.

The Remagen bridgehead is now eleven miles wide and six miles deep. The news is that the Germans are using long-range artillery and bringing up panzer units. I bet they are. If they cannot drive one small bridgehead back into the water, how can they hope to stop us when we get half a dozen over.

March 15th.

We had our first rehearsal to-day. Quite fun doing an operation without anybody shooting back, no bother at all. The two young officers who were doing control at our loading area were simply bloody and didn't know their job, so there were long intervals while buffaloes were waiting for something to load up. There was no tactical aspect to the exercise as the sappers had only had time to clear a small part of the far bank, so we just sat down in one of the few fields which was clear of mines, and awaited our turn to be ferried back again.

The Black Watch went past as we were sitting sunning ourselves, and there was some baa-baa-ing on the part of our Jocks. This was an allusion to an old scandal of a Black Watch N.C.O. who stole a sheep. To this the Black Watch replied with, "What's for supper to-night, boys?" to which their answer was a chorus of "Cheese!" This referred to an incident in 1916 when a big round Dutch cheese rolled off the back of a ration truck in the dark and some jumpy Gordons riddled it with bullets. It was all very good-humoured, this chaff, and there was a lot of laughter on both sides. But some of us stopped it as one never knows where these things end, and once a feud between two regiments starts, it may last, literally, for a hundred years. There was a terrible feud between the Black Watch and the Gordons in the last war which has fortunately quite died out, and the last thing one wants is to see it start up again.

5-7th Gordons and 5th Camerons have stolen a march on us. The 5-7th have had their pre-war white spats and diced hose-tops sent out, and hairy white sporrans for their Pipe Band. But the Camerons have gone even better; they have kilts, bought privately, for every man in the Battalion.

George Dunn has just got the 2nd Seaforths, which my great-grandfather, Martin Lindsay, commanded for no less than twenty years. He's been two and a half years a second-in-command, during which he has collected two D.S.O.s and an M.C. So it was high time he got promotion.

March 16th.

I have just read in the Divisional Intelligence Summary that the first assault crossing of the Rhine was that of Julius Cæsar in 55 B.C. Apparently he deemed it unworthy of either himself or the Roman people to make the crossing by boat, so he built a wooden bridge from Gaul to Germany, between Andernach and Coblenz. Ten days after starting to bring up bridging material, Cæsar's bridge was built and his army had begun to cross—a wonderful achievement for those or any other days in view of the depth of the water and strength of the current. He must have had a good C.R.E.

To-day's big news is that the C.O. has got a bar to his D.S.O. Actually it should have been the original D.S.O. since it is a periodical award dated last September when he was in 15th (S) Division, and his immediate award, which came through first the other day, should have been a bar to it, which just shows how absurd the present system is. No M.M.s through for the men yet, a bad show.

March 17th.

Last night we did another exercise. It was a bit of a flop as it was foggy, and the buffaloes, after getting into the river successfully, couldn't find their way out on the other side. So it was stopped in the middle before any of 1st Gordons had crossed. In fact, if there is fog on the night of der Tag it seems that it may bitch the whole show.

March 18th.

Final briefing of C.O.'s at Divisional H.Q. Even the provost notices had signs with "Last Supper" on them, which some may think was not in the best of taste. We are told that we may not get our A Echelon vehicles up for twelve days, so we had some loading trials to-day to see what a company can pack into its transport consisting of one jeep, four carriers and a 15-cwt.

I wish I wasn't always so tired nowadays, in spite of the fact that I've had eleven hours' sleep almost every night since Operation Veritable.

March 19th.

Spent most of the day doing courts martial—five men in 5th B.W. on eighteen charges between them, desertion and absence.

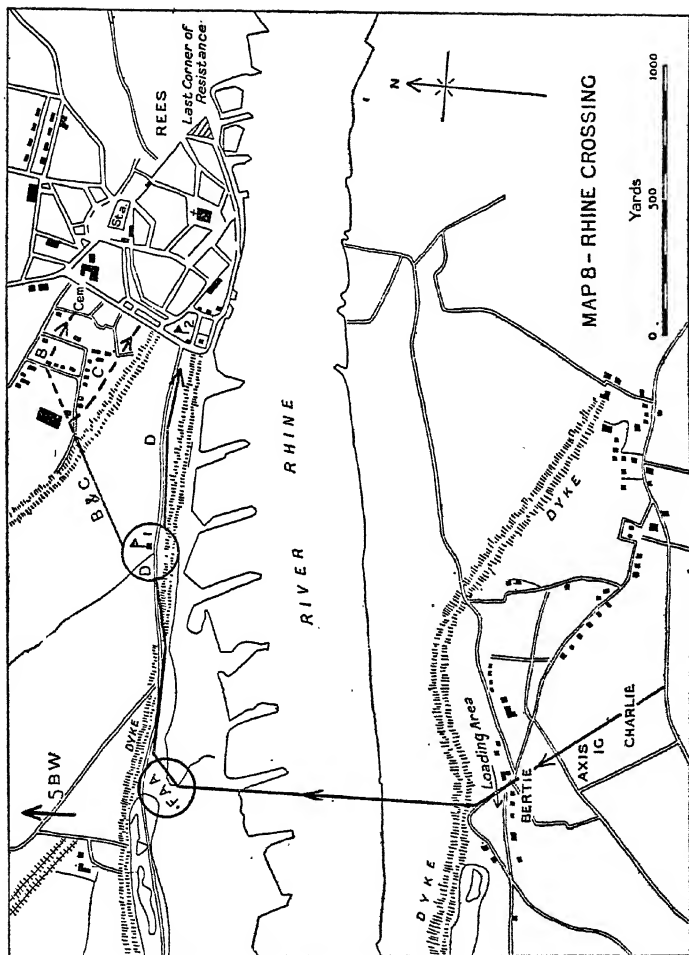
Joyce writes that it has been a good week as Lindsay *ma* has just received his colours and I have got the D.S.O.

March 20th.

Operation Plunder is taking shape. Our crossing will have the support of seven field, ten medium and a heavy and a super-heavy regiment, also two rocket-firing batteries (?) and two 4.2 mortar companies; but many of us still wonder whether, if we had crossed a week ago, the surprise would not have been worth much of this support. Our objective is Rees, which was badly cratered and burnt out during an air-raid last January.

March 21st.

We leave this afternoon so as to arrive in a concentration area near the Rhine after dark. This place has done us well and I feel quite homesick leaving it. A stately-looking house and lovely avenues leading to it, but rather spoilt by the whitewashed walls both inside and out. A moat and bridge over it, and pigeons cooing in some big, old beeches just behind it complete the picture.



The latest intelligence reports say that the Hun has "about 100 guns north of Rees in thirty heavy batteries, well dispersed," which have been spotted on air photos. The last week has been lovely spring weather, and we must hope that it will not break during the next three days.

Zero hour is 48 hours from 9 p.m. to-night.

March 22nd.

A very tiring afternoon and evening yesterday—a long drive up here at 15 m.p.h., leading the convoy and being continuously held up by the Black Watch in front of us, though no doubt it was not their fault. We are at a place called Marienbaum, twenty miles inside the German border and about four from where we are to cross. It has been smashed up and most of the roof is off our H.Q. house. A S.P. gun was trying to knock the place down a bit more this morning, but stopped after firing some twenty rounds.

This afternoon I jeaped up to the crossing area to do a recce of the scene of my operations of to-morrow night (*see Map 8*) There is a high dyke stretching along this bank, and no movement for half a mile this side of it can be seen from beyond the Rhine. This stretch includes a long straggling village which is being held by one or two companies of 1st Royal Ulster Rifles in 3rd Division. They have had to be pretty alert at night as the Hun has been sending over patrols to try to see if we have been dumping bridging materials up here. There have been occasional salvoes of shells and mortar bombs, and I noted that our chosen loading area has by no means escaped attention—it is at a cross-roads and an obvious target. I visited R.U.R. H.Q. and arranged for their three-inch mortars to help us with a smoke-screen which we shall want at one stage to-morrow night, and also got their nearest formation to agree to dig some slit-trenches for the company waiting area next door to the loading area. They said they would boil up some tea for the companies as they passed through. Although the enemy can't see anything immediately behind the dyke, he can see everything a bit further back where the country is extremely open. So we have been keeping a con-

stant smoke-screen during the hours of daylight, which I believe extends some sixty miles up-river.

The plan for to-morrow is that all the buffaloes take 5th B.W. across first, then our companies, then the F Echelon vehicles of the Black Watch, and then ours. We cross to the left of Rees and then turn right-handed and capture the town. 154 Brigade cross two or three miles further downstream, then 152 pass through and peg out their claims further inland. We start at 9 p.m. after a four-hour fire programme. Then the guns switch round to the right to fire in support of 15th Scottish, who start, about five miles upstream, five hours after us. As soon as we have captured Rees, or before if possible, the R.E. start building a large number of rafts, and bridges of all sizes and kinds. Several thousand sappers are involved in these exploits; their vehicles alone number 940. Of course nobody doubts that the whole party will be a cake-walk. The only thing that remains to be seen is who are going to be the unlucky chaps who get hit.

March 23rd.

It is 5 p.m., so H minus four hours has just passed and the fire programme has started. There is a continuous ripple of slams and bangs as all our guns, stretching across so many fields behind, are firing, and this is to go on for four hours until the Black Highlanders begin to cross at 9 p.m.

I am in a little cellar only eight feet by six feet just on the edge of the paddock where we are going to load up the buffaloes. Cornish, my batman, Akers, my jeep driver and Bowlby, a signaller, are with me, and what good chaps they are! Akers, just twenty, has a clean, shining, almost baby face and is always smiling. He has shown in the past that he is completely indifferent to shellfire; I really believe he is one of the very few men who just doesn't know what fear is. Cornish is ten years older, tall and rather gaunt, and like Danny, his previous master, he's a bit of a tough character. Bowlby is a new-comer to the regiment, from a disbanded Queen's battalion, and is a short little chap with a prematurely old face rather like Mr. Punch. He reminds me of those drawings of little old men by Emett. (Quite

a lot of stuff is beginning to come back from the other side, mostly medium and light mortar so far. I'm glad we got ourselves installed here before the fire programme started.) Cornish is brewing up tea on a small paraffin pressure stove a foot away from me. Akers is writing to his mother, and I have told him to ask her to send us another of her excellent home-made cakes.

I had better start by describing the day as it began. After breakfast I came up here with Cornish, Akers and Bowlby, to dig a couple of slit-trenches in the corner of the paddock next door to the Royals' command post, so that we shall have some cover when the stuff begins to fly. When they had started, the Intelligence Sergeant and I then followed up the route along which the Battalion will come to-night to see what snags there might be to finding it in the dark. He is going to light it in certain places and put down white tape in others. We also selected three company waiting areas and marked them "Algy," "Percy" and "Charlie" with painted notice-boards. Happily there were old German diggings at each, so the companies will have cover while waiting. The companies will be called forward by me, successively from one position to another, by wireless as things proceed. "Bertie," the fourth position, is just off the loading area, and 1st R.U.R. dug slits there for us yesterday. There has been no smoke-screen all day and we don't know why. It may be in order to avoid any risk of the smoke hanging about on low ground and blinding the buffaloes to-night.

Driving round, I saw many odd sights: Pioneer Corps companies with bridging material and the R.A.S.C. making dumps, both in the front line; our medium and heavy artillery deployed within enemy mortar range; some gun-crews stripped to the waist digging frantically for victory, while other soldiers wandered past them on bicycles and even on horseback (there was no shelling this morning); odd men milking cows; thirty dead cows in a minefield; some ownerless and rather skinny pigs scavenging round; masses of tanks and lorries containing bridging material moving forward; many notices put up by 3rd Division asking us to minimise our dust, one of which was

quite witty: on the first tree "Ashes to Ashes," on the second "Dust to Dust" and on the third "Your Dust turns us into Ashes," with underneath a small picture of a grave with a cross on it. The Huns seem to have been evacuated from here. It was all a mystery to me as I strolled around in the sunshine, no smoke-screen on this last and most vital day and yet no enemy shelling either. (But they are shelling now all right, and one mortar is dropping its stuff round here. I hope to God our C.B. programme gets it before the companies reach here. Two and a half hours to go.)

In the last hour I have been reading a *Sunday Times* review of Moran's "Anatomy of Courage." It quotes his theory that courage must be husbanded. "Courage is will-power, whereof no man has an unlimited stock, and when in war it is used up, he is finished. A man's courage is his capital and he is always spending." How right he is! I can think of an officer with a M.C. and Bar and several N.C.O.s with M.M.s who bear this out. They were all decorated for fine leadership in North Africa and Sicily and must presumably have been the pick of the Battalion. The officer was finished before he was killed and the N.C.O.s—the few that remain—are all pretty well useless to-day. They have all had to carry on far too long. I can quote my own case too. Until a month or two ago, though I hated being shelled, I used positively to look forward to the thrill of battle. Now, though I have not yet got to the stage of dreading an action, I get no pleasure out of it and look forward only to the end of the war. I shall be particularly glad when this operation is safely over as it is certainly the most difficult we have had since the original Normandy landings.

7.30 p.m. and one and a half hours to go. A tremendous rumble of guns behind us, their shells whistling overhead, and the nice sharp banging, bouncing sound of our 25-pounder shells landing on the far bank. But this mortar is still smacking down right in the loading area, and one dreads the thought of a mortar bomb landing in a buffalo with twenty-eight not-so-gay Gordons inside—it's quite a big target. Bofors guns have now begun to thicken up the fire programme. Let's hope that between them all they manage to silence this mortar.

March 24th.

It is 3.45 a.m. and we have been back in the cellar since 1 a.m. We got all the Battalion across without a single casualty. Wonderful, wonderful luck. Now they are loading the Black Watch vehicles and I have nothing to do till they are ready for ours in perhaps a couple of hours' time. We have had nothing like the shelling and mortaring expected, which says a lot for our C.B. organisation; certainly there has been a fair amount of both, but very ragged and scattered and none of the heavy, accurate concentrations we had reason to expect.

It all took very much longer than we had hoped. The pre-stowed loads—the Argylls of 154 Brigade away on our left, 5th B.W. in front of us and 5-7th Gordons to the east of Rees—got across and took all their objectives without undue difficulty. Then there was a very long pause while we waited for our buffaloes. On the return trip they had difficulty in getting out of the water and up the bank, and the sappers had to blow some holes for them. However, the Battalion all got across between 11.15 p.m. and 1 a.m., and such shelling as there was fortunately came down between the companies.

It is a lovely night with a three-quarter moon. I shall always remember the scene in the loading area: the massive bulk of the buffaloes; the long ghostly files of men marching up to them, their flickering shadows and those of a smashed farmhouse and the armoured car at the Royals' post; a few busy figures darting here and there in the moonlight directing people into this and that buffalo; a chink of light shining up from the slit entrance to the command post whence came a continual flow of R/T conversation in the usual jargon: "Oboe five to baker four—oboe five over," and so on. All this against the background of the guns firing with the steady rhythm of African drums.

War is full of odd contrasts, and just when the scene was looking its most macabre and sinister I saw something white scurry out of a hedge and dodge into a passing soldier. There was a clink of his shovel knocking against a rifle and an oath as he stumbled, and then I saw that it was a sheep and the first lamb of spring as they came trotting up the path towards me—poor things. First spring lambs always make me think of our

honeymoon, for I shall never forget my astonishment when, motoring down to Somerset, we turned in at the lodge gates and, in mid-December, found the park full of young lambs. It was with these incongruous thoughts in my head that I, too, trotted up the path to tell C Company that we were now ready to load them.

Once again Cornish is brewing up and we are listening to the battle on our 46-set. It appears that D Company has had some casualties, and C are held up as B, in front of them, are having trouble. The C.O. has been trying to get the two company commanders to their sets to talk to him. The 46-sets seem to be working perfectly and I can hear the companies talking quite plainly on the other side of the river. Once or twice they have had difficulty in hearing each other and then our set, though much further away, has come up on the air and passed a message.

How lovely the primroses in the Sussex woods must be just now!

5 a.m. and I have just been outside, but the Black Watch vehicles are taking the hell of a time, so I returned again to this grubby little cellar. The buffaloes are having trouble with their tracks as the result of the rough going, and there are long intervals between their reporting back for reloading. There has been a recrudescence of shelling and mortaring, and one or two in the loading area, the first since Zero, but the only casualties have been to two men of a B.W. anti-tank gun-crew, from long-range rifle or M.G. fire coming over the dyke. The bullets were pretty well spent and they are not badly hurt, more amazed at being hit when they had heard nothing.

A little while ago I thought of having a nap, then news from C Company, and not too good, began to come over the air. I started to get anxious and so took over the earphones and told Bowlby to get some sleep. (Akers and Cornish have both been snoring loudly for some time.) The first intimation of trouble was Alec asking the Colonel to send up his spare officer, who had been left on the far bank with the company greatcoats and some other kit which they had taken across and dumped. Then

he was telling D Company in the farmhouse area to send up part of one of his platoons which had not crossed the dyke with the remainder. It was not hard to guess that this meant that the company had been shelled on its way forward, and that a platoon commander had been hit and some of the platoon had in consequence got lost or gone to ground. Meanwhile B and C Companies were fighting in the housing estate and gardens on the far side of the dyke and meeting a good deal of resistance. A little later I heard Alec at the end of a conversation with the C.O. say, in a cheerful voice: "Of course it will soon be light and the advantage will then change, I don't quite know in whose favour." But it soon became apparent that it was in the enemy's, for C Company was still fighting in the orchards short of Rees when they came under fire from the Bosche holding some of the houses at the outskirts of the town and by this time able to see well enough to shoot.

The next thing I heard was an acrimonious conversation between Alec (C Company) and George Morrison (B). Alec was telling George that he hadn't put a platoon where he said he was going to, and that the enemy had in consequence been able to get round his flank. He then spoke to the C.O. and said he was pinned down in the open with Huns on three sides of him and that he must withdraw on to B Company as he was getting casualties, could not get forward and his position was untenable. Having extracted a reluctant permission from the C.O. to withdraw, he decided to hold on for a little longer, and then began to feel his way forward once more. About 8 a.m. I heard him report that he had reached the first row of houses in the town. Later on I heard B Company say they had passed through the cemetery and reached the edge of Rees, having taken about seventy prisoners. An hour or two after that Bowlby said he gathered that D Company had also reached the town, along the water's edge.

The landing of the two airborne divisions took place about 9 a.m., but there was a haze so we didn't see anything.

We started to load our vehicles about 10 a.m., and I had just got the company ambulance jeeps and a carrier full of S.A.A. on board (the C.O.'s jeep and battery commander's carrier with

their R/T sets had crossed with them), when the General came up and asked if there was anything else we urgently wanted across.

"Well, Sir," I said, "I'd like to get a couple of mortars over."

"All right," he said, "then after that 152 will have priority. I want to get their stuff over next."

He told me that all was going very well and that the bridgehead was now about eight miles wide and two miles deep.

So from now on I had a lazy morning. Our turn came about one, and I myself went over with my jeep about three. As soon as we got through the dyke I was amazed to see the great throng of sappers that were working on the bank in full view of the enemy still holding Rees a mile up-river. An occasional shell came over and landed with a splash in the Rhine, sending up a tall column of water. I soon realised what an ideal place had been chosen for crossing, as on each bank the green meadows sloped gently down to the water. I was struck by the breadth of the river—it is much broader than the Thames at Westminster Bridge—and by the speed of the current. We reached the far side without incident, and the buffalo took us about 400 yards across the grass and up to the road, where there were guides for each unit. I saw one or two carriers which had blown up, and there was a good deal of white tape and Mines notices. It did not take long to reach the farm which was badly knocked about. There were more mines notices round the small garden immediately in front of the house, and a regimental policeman at the doorway told me that D Company had lost three men there on schu-mines when they reached it.

Inside I found the Brigadier in conference with Bill Bradford and the C.O., planning the coming night's operations to continue the clearing of Rees and district. As soon as they had gone, the Colonel told me that General Rennie was killed this morning in his jeep by a mortar bomb when driving to 152 Brigade H.Q. It must have been quite soon after he left me. This is a terrible blow. It's awfully sad as he has gone so far with us and has now been killed in the last lap. He always set great, perhaps

exaggerated, store by the personal bravery and example of officers, and so scorned to drive about in an armoured car like most of his brigadiers so sensibly do. I suppose his death is not so very surprising in view of the risks he took. You cannot dice against the law of averages and get away with it for ever. I remember him standing at the start-line of the Battalion attack on Secqueville-la-Campagne last summer when there was a good deal of mortar fire, and no doubt he has since watched many other battalions go into the attack. I also remember that he was very narrowly missed by a sniper, who put a bullet through the window out of which he was looking, when making a recce before our first canal crossing. He was a great man and a great figure, one of the tallest men in the Division, and quite unmistakable to any Jock as he stood at the roadside and watched them moving up into battle. He always wore one of those naval duffle coats with the hood hanging down at the back, his hands in the two large front pockets, and on his head always a tam o' shanter with the red hackle of his old regiment, the Black Watch; I am quite sure he did not even possess the ordinary general's red hat. No wonder the Jocks loved him. He has undoubtedly made the Division what it is to-day, the best in Second Army.

At the Battalion Command Post I could now piece together the sequence of events on this side of the river. Enemy shelling was pretty heavy during the night and, as I feared, C Company had the worst of it, one salvo coming down in the middle of one of their platoons, killing Titterton, the platoon commander, and inflicting about twelve other casualties. Titterton was a tall, good-looking young officer who joined us about a fortnight ago. I hardly knew him. Rodger, a Canadian subaltern in D Company, and his platoon sergeant, Matthews, have also been killed. They were in a Hun trench near the water's edge when it received a direct hit. Matthews was one of the few remaining sergeants who have commanded a platoon times without number when we have been short of officers. The I.O., Kenneth McDonald, has been wounded—shell splinters in the face—but they say he is not bad. A shell landed very close to him and the C.O. as they were walking up to the farmhouse. I had not seen the C.O. under fire until last night; he is one of the

naturally cool and brave sort. Gray is also wounded, for the second time, but the doctor says he's not bad either, multiple small wounds in the arm and shoulder. So it cost us some fifty casualties, including four officers, to reach the outskirts of Rees after crossing the Rhine. And there is no doubt we have been let off lightly. I still can't get over the fact that we got the whole Battalion across the water without a single casualty.

Since then we have been slowly cleaning up the nearest side of the town. All the four rifle companies are now in Rees and have just about cleared up to the main street running north and south through the middle of it. It is a slow job.

The enemy are now (7 p.m.) putting over some very heavy and accurate concentrations on the south bank in front of Rees, and I fear the sappers and pioneers must be having many casualties. They have obviously got an artillery O.P. in the east side of the town, and the sooner we clean it up the better. Most of the shelling is on the site of the Class 9 Raft (this raft is propelled by outboard engines and takes two or three trucks or 100 men), and they have sunk one of them with a direct hit with a heavy shell.

We have just listened to the nine o'clock news and, for the first time, they have released the names of units and formations. The Second Army has crossed the Rhine in five places, with the famous 51st Highland Division in the lead. This Division which has fought all the way from Alamein, etc. They were followed five hours later by 15th Scottish and two hours after that by the American 9th Army. A battalion of K.O.S.B. has joined up with 6th Airborne Division, and so on.

Meanwhile we are supposed to be capturing Rees and, for the moment, are not doing very much about it. Apart from the fact that we are all tired, having had no sleep last night, every one who actually has to do it knows that street fighting at night is not possible. So the C.O. appealed to the Brigade Commander to allow us to start again at first light, which is now about 5.30 a.m. It was referred to the Corps Commander, but we were told to go straight on as the importance of clearing Rees, so that the sappers can build their bridges unhindered, is paramount.

So the C.O. gave out orders for us to start at nine to-night (not that we have stopped all day, except for a pause of about two hours this evening for food). Then we discovered that the Black Watch, who are clearing the station and surrounding buildings in the northern part of the town, are doing a wide encircling movement and are not likely to reach the station area before first light. This altered the whole situation and the C.O. immediately put off our start until midnight. But we didn't dare tell Brigade this. They thought we had started at nine and have more than once asked us for a sitrep. It is a little tricky trying to give periodical progress reports about an operation which is not taking place, and I have had to temporise with "going slowly according to plan," etc. We are really only taking very limited objectives to-night, to get us into a good jumping-off position for the morrow.

152 Brigade are now very much out in front and, if the enemy have any kick left at all, they should be sharply counter-attacked at dawn to-morrow.

March 25th.

A somewhat exhausting and not very satisfactory day, and it's not over yet by any means.

Those of us who were able to turn in for a few hours during the night slept rather unevenly as the artillery, just across the river, were going great guns all night. In fact I dreamed that a huge demon of a C.C.R.A. was lashing the crews with a gigantic whip, crying "Faster, you so-and-so's, faster!"

By breakfast-time the companies had all taken their limited objectives of the night before, and D and C Companies had reached the church and cleaned up all the water-line as far as that, but the enemy were still resisting fiercely in what was still rather more than one-third of the town. After breakfast the C.O. decided to move Tac H.Q. down to a large cellar in a house in the nearest street in Rees, half a mile from us. He went on with the wireless set and one or two officers, leaving me to bring on the remainder of the men and vehicles in my own time. Soon after they had left, two or three salvoes of fairly heavy shells came down between us and the new H.Q., and I hoped they had been able to reach it

in time. I put off our departure for about twenty minutes, by which time peace reigned again. When I reached the cellar I was greeted by: "The Colonel has been hit," and there he was, sitting in a chair, saying he was quite all right but looking pretty green. I sent for our doctor, who said he had a small fragment in the ribs, and that of course he ought really to go back, but he didn't think it had penetrated, in which case he would be all right. I said:

"For God's sake go back, for you will only cramp my style if you are going to sit at my elbow while I command the Battalion," which perhaps was not very well put. He replied, "No, you go down and see how the companies are, and I will stay by the set." Half an hour later Jack rang me up to say that the C.O. wasn't feeling at all well and had allowed himself to be evacuated.

The first thing I heard when I got down to C Company was that Porter, another subaltern in D Company, had been killed by the same salvo that hit the C.O. I was dreadfully sorry about this; he was such a good fellow and had done so well in that night attack with D Company until he was wounded by the schu-mine. His father is a doctor in Southport, and Porter was destined for the same profession but said that he wanted to fight with the infantry before starting his medical training. That makes seventy officer battle casualties since D-Day.

C Company H.Q. was in the corner house opposite the square, and I decided to run the remainder of the battle from there. A Company was now moving across in the middle to clean up to a line between the church and the station, and D was occupying the houses just east and south of the church. B were then to move forward through C and D to clean up the rest of the waterfront as far as the eastern corner of the town. It all sounds very easy when one writes it down, but this is far from being so. The clearing of every single house is a separate little military operation requiring a special reconnaissance, plan and execution. And the enemy have been resisting fiercely all the time with spandaus, bazookas and snipers, and only withdrawing a little further back at the last moment when their position becomes untenable.

When I reached C Company I found them full of enthusiasm for McNair, who was attached to us for the operation with three 3.7 howitzers. These are the little guns that one has seen naval teams take to pieces at Olympia, pass over an obstacle and put together again on the other side. For three years they have been training near Inverness for mountain warfare, and were rushed out here specially for this operation, being the only artillery which is small enough to go in a buffalo. They have a range of 6,000 yards and fire a 21-lb. shell, and much more accurately than any other gun, as they guarantee the strike to within eighty yards. This was McNair's first action, and such enthusiasm for battle as he showed can seldom have been seen before—in fact, it was rather easy for some of our more battle-weary officers to be quite funny about it. For each situation in this street-to-street battle McNair had some excellent suggestion for using his gun. He hauled it over rubble, rushed it round corners, layed it on a house that was giving trouble, dodged back again, prepared his charges, and then back to fire them. He even took it to bits and mounted it in an upstairs room. "Exactly which window is the sniper in?" he said, and then, when the sniper fired at him, "Oh, that one!" and laid his gun on it. It set houses on fire as well as any crocodile, and the effect on the enemy was devastating. This very brave officer took incredible risks; finally he ran out into a street which was under fire and pulled in a wounded officer. He and his gun became the talk of the companies, and already, in a few hours, he has become an almost legendary character!

The enemy are now pushed back to quite a small area, about 200 yards by 200 yards, at the very east end of the town. B Company is trying to clean them up, as indeed they have been trying to do for the last three or four hours, while A, D and the Black Watch to the north are acting as stops to prevent them breaking out. These Hun parachutists are incredibly tough. They have been chased out of France, Belgium and Holland, into Germany, back over the Rhine, and now street by street across Rees into a corner. Yet they are still fighting it out. B Company has had a very difficult fight and the last two hours' work has cost us three more officers. This morning I told Halleron that Porter had been

killed. He replied "Oh, God! He was my greatest friend." An hour later he himself was killed, shot through the back by a sniper while doing a recce at a street corner. Then MacDonald was hit by a whole burst of spandau or schmeisser; he has been evacuated but is paralysed and cannot possibly live. Then Burrell, shot in the head. He was a spare officer in B Company who only came up to take over a platoon to-day, and off he went to it, full of great enthusiasm, to be killed within the hour.

It is 7 p.m. and we have just had a conference of company commanders. George arrived from B, saying: "Never say steel helmets aren't any good." He had been hit on his by a glancing bullet from a sniper, just at the join of the crown and the brim where the metal is of double thickness. It undoubtedly saved his life.

The situation now is that the enemy are confined to the last hundred yards, at the very tip of the east end, but they are in a strong position with deep trenches and concrete, and any attempts to get at it are met by heavy fire. I am going to make a last effort with C Company, who are going round by the Black Watch to try to take this position from the rear. This has not hitherto been possible as 5th B.W. have only recently finished cleaning up that area, for which they were able to use tanks. C Company will have one complete street to clear and then this final position, and if this comes off the job is finished and we can all get out our pyjamas. If they don't succeed I shall get the street cleared with a bulldozer during the night and try to get two crocodiles up to the position at first light, and I have sent for a Brigade L.O. so that they can take preliminary steps to get hold of the crocs. Before this I will pull everybody back 200 yards and put down the hell of a stonk with McNair's 3.7 howitzers. O.C. C Company and his platoon commanders are now visiting the Black Watch and doing a recce.

March 26th.

Well, it came off, and the job was finished last night, thank goodness. Before C set off, B sent in four or five prisoners, including a captain who said he was in command. It appeared

that as soon as it was dark he told them all to split up into small groups to try to get through to the German lines. He was marched in front of me as I sat at my table poring over the map, and gave me a spectacular Hitler salute, which I ignored. I was very annoyed that, instead of being killed to a man, they had apparently won out in the end, escaping with their lives after shooting lots of our chaps. He was a nasty piece of work, cocksure and good-looking in a flashy sort of way, but I had to admire the brave resistance which he had put up. The strain of the battle was apparent in the dark black chasms under his eyes. He said that they had left eight badly wounded men in two dug-outs.

"Very well," I said. "You will guide C Company to them and you will have your hands tied behind you so that you do not slip away in the dark."

He began to complain that the soldiers who had taken him prisoner had stolen his note-case.

"My good man," I replied, "the German Army has plundered everything they could lay their hands on in Europe. You surely don't expect any sympathy from me?"

Then B Company sent word to say that they had entered the strong-point which had caused all the trouble and that it was unoccupied, so we knew that C Company would have no trouble. About the same time we heard that Burrell was not dead, but hit in the back of the neck and had lost a couple of fingers, and that they got him back as soon as it was dark. The doctor says he will recover, which is excellent news.

It was a great moment when at 10 p.m. we were able to send the signal that the town was clear. Since then we have been overloaded with congratulations. The Corps Commander and the Divisional Commander both visited us specially, and the Brigadier says he thinks it is the best thing the Battalion has ever done. The Corps Commander said that, in his experience, the best troops are whacked after twenty-four hours' street fighting, but we had kept it up for forty-eight hours, against the best part of two enemy battalions of picked parachutists. Let us hope that these congratulations pay a dividend in the form of a good crop of decorations for the other ranks who have done so splendidly.

I walked round the battlefield this morning, and was astonished

at the strength of the enemy position which had held out for so long at the end of the town. I counted fifteen captured spandaus in that last 100 yards. Going round the companies, I found a cocky wee Gordon with his face all cut about, a great little chap named Blackman. I had heard about him at Thomas-hof, when a solid shot was fired into the room he was in. He continued to keep watch at the window without budging an inch, remarking only "that one was a little close." Yesterday he was looking out of another window when a Hun fired a bazooka at him, which burst very near, chipping his face with brick fragments. For half an hour he disappeared on a private vendetta of his own to hunt down the firer. Two vacancies have come through for short leave to Paris, and George tells me that he offered one to Blackman this morning but he turned it down, saying that he wasn't going to take any leave until he had caught up with the man with the bazooka.

I was out when the Corps Commander, Horrocks, visited our H.Q., but I met him in the town this morning and took him to see that position. He was very interested in it all and most complimentary. Afterwards he took the trouble to explain the situation to the company commanders whom we had picked up in the course of our wanderings, with his big map placed on the bonnet of his jeep. He said that the next week may be bloody since we (ourselves and 43rd Division on our left) have the best German troops in front of us, but that after that we shall break them down, the armour will go through and, since the Huns have nothing much behind, we shall then start motoring.

The most surprising feature of the last twenty-four hours is the lack of shelling. I thought that as soon as the Hun was satisfied that his troops in here had been mopped up, we'd get hell. After all, Rees is, as it were, the port to which all the bridges come and through which all roads must lead. I mentioned this to Horrocks, who said that the absence of shelling is due to the fine weather, since we are taking air-photos all the time, and as soon as a new battery is spotted about sixty guns open up on it. He also told me that the Corps sappers have had 150 casualties.

Alvar Liddel has just said in the nine o'clock news: "It is with

great regret that we announce the death of . . ." and I thought at once of our beloved General, but it was only Lloyd George.

March 27th.

I was walking through the town yesterday talking to Alastair Duncan-Miller, who commands our R.E. Field Company, when there was a loud bang from up the street. He sprinted off, thinking it was a mine which his sappers had failed to discover, only to find a few Jocks sweating and cussing round the front of a safe which they were trying to open.

Two good remarks, operators' chat, on the German R/T from their Rees O.P. were picked up by our intercept. One was: "I hear old Fritz has been given the Iron Cross. What about us poor so-and-so's forward in the O.P.s?" The other was: "What shall we report?" "Oh, better say 'nothing to report' as otherwise they get such wind up behind."

I hear that 53rd (Welsh) Division are very annoyed about all the publicity the Highland Division has been having. They say it is only because the English papers want to increase their circulation in the North of Scotland!

March 28th.

Yesterday was a bloody day. We were ordered to advance beyond 154 Brigade and take a position four and a half miles north of Rees. The usual hurried show. I left Brigade with my orders at twelve, making my plan in the jeep on the way back, to give out my own orders to the company commanders, tanks, machine-gunners, anti-tanks, gunners, adjutant, O.C. A Echelon and so on at 12.15. I had not even met the tank commander until he arrived at 12.20, just as I was about to kick off, but I was immediately heartened to find that he was none other than my old chum, Bill Enderby of the Bays, now commanding a squadron of Sherwood Rangers.

After orders had been given out I went off with the company commanders to find out how the land lay, while Alec brought up the Battalion: the companies to rest in some fields and a few buildings, and the vehicles to a park just behind. Newly installed as second-in-command of the Argylls, I found Jim Church, whom

I had last seen thirteen years before in Shanghai—what a wonderful freemasonry the peace-time regular army is!—and he told me that it was quiet there on the whole, though there were sudden spasms of mortaring. We could not do a recce as the country was dead flat.

There was a good deal of "orders, counter-orders and disorder" just before we got off at 5 p.m., as 43rd Division was in front of us on our left and there were conflicting reports as to where exactly they were. So first we were to advance behind a barrage, then it was cancelled as being too dangerous for them, then they weren't there at all and it was put on again.

The first two companies took their objectives without very much opposition (five or six casualties), helped largely by the tanks who were operating in darkness owing to delays caused by mines. What a joy it is to meet a regiment which really goes, as we have sometimes been so disappointed by our armoured support. But meanwhile I was having hell as the road was mined and I couldn't get my carrier with its two R/t sets forward, and the company sets seemed to be pretty well out of range. So I had great difficulty in telling when they had reached their objectives and knowing when to launch the next company, and this seemed to go on for hours.

I did all possible, sending Alec and the I.O. forward and also an intermediate R/T set, but it all took ages. I also kept moving the H.Q. forward each time that the sappers had cleared the road. These moves were very exciting as there was a good deal of mortaring. I'd say to my signallers: "Come on Hastings, Armitage, on we go." They would take down their aerials and begin to coil up the leads, and Rowbotham would move over towards the dark shape which was the carrier, and then suddenly there would be a shower of stuff and we'd all come flying back into the doorway. Mortaring is not like shelling, you don't hear the distant whistle of the shells coming slowly from afar. There is a sudden swish and a crack as the first bomb arrives, and you have hardly any time before the others land. We'd wait a few minutes half-way down the cellar steps and then I'd say: "Come on, chaps, now we'll go." And then, when half-way over to the carrier, we'd hear the swishes and the cracks and some would drop flat while

the others dodged back into the house. But it wasn't fun at all. Last autumn I thought it was, but I don't now.

It was quite unpleasant, though far, far worse for the sappers. I certainly take off my hat to these men. It is all the same for the assault R.E.—either building bridges or clearing roads of mines in places where the enemy cannot fail to know that we need bridges or roads, and therefore always under fire. It is different for us who have a job to do and then are able to dig in. I would put the unpleasantness, by which I mean the danger, of soldiering in this campaign as: firstly, field companies, R.E.; secondly, infantry; and thirdly, either airborne formations (who have long rests at home between operations) or tank crews (who are not called upon to fight so often as infantry). And the rest (with the German 1944-45 shortage of ammunition) nowhere at all in comparison.

During intervals in the battle, in the cellars that were our H.Q., Bill Enderby and I talked about our time together at Sandhurst, his shamba in Kenya, the Galway Blazers, and the Sherwood Rangers, until 1939 the private regiment, as it were, of Lord Yarborough, my landlord and neighbour. What a change and a joy!

But the battle dragged on. At intervals Alastair Duncan-Miller strolled in to report the progress of his sappers, in a raincoat and soft hat, for all the world as if he were just off to the races. With the signal difficulties and the darkness—it was overcast and men always think and move slowly at night—it took us seven hours to get all our objectives. Bruce Rae was slightly wounded and for the fourth time, hit by a shell splinter while standing on the top of one of the tanks to get a better view. Our tanks were unfortunate, two officers and the sergeant-major becoming casualties on mines. We also lost a S.P. gun, and a carrier in which the driver had both legs blown off. The companies actually took their objectives without much difficulty, though it was nearly daylight before the road was clear and vehicles reached them.

While we were milling about, 5th B.W. and 5-7th Gordons were getting on well on the right, and 152 Brigade passed up the road through us. Soon after breakfast this morning our artillery

began to move up, and before long we found ourselves in the middle of our gun-lines. This had also been part of the enemy gun-lines for the defence of the Rhine, and I went for a walk to look for all the blasted and broken guns I hoped to find from our counter-battery, but not one did I see. They have got them all away. And I have seen very few dead Germans (except for a civilian or two; we killed a woman this afternoon when we sent tanks out with a small patrol and they shot up a house). It depresses one and makes one think that all we do is to keep driving them back without breaking them and smashing them, and that it will go on for a very long time and cost us a lot of good men yet. Every battle we go into I think of these magnificent company commanders of ours: George Morrison, Alec Lumsden, Bruce Rae, and "Casey" Petrie, and dread to hear that one of them has got it.

March 31st.

I must bring myself to face this fact. The last little operation took seven hours instead of three or four because I was windy. It was the mortaring which influenced me to stay at my H.Q. in the orthodox way, instead of being right up behind the leading companies on foot. It is so easy to shirk a little when you are the battalion commander. The truth is that I am not half the man I was six or even three months ago and seem to have lost all my old dash.

Yesterday I was sent to 33 and 34 Reinforcements Holding Units to try to pick up some Gordon N.C.O.s before the other two battalions pinch them, and I got five, but all very junior. It was an enjoyable drive. The blossom and spring flowers are now out and one or two front gardens are a mass of hyacinths. Apart from that the journey was much the same as along all these roads: flat fields with here and there a man or woman behind a plough or harrow, hamlets with blitzed houses, odd graves by the roadside, an occasional blown-up tank or truck. Once I saw the peculiarly sad sight of a burnt-out tank and four crosses beside it. The shell craters in the side roads are most indifferently filled in. They and the twisted and blasted

trees above them, the Mines notices and white tape roping in small minefields at the roadside, and occasional dumps of mines which have been lifted and collected together, remind one continually that fierce fighting took place not so long ago down all these roads and lanes.

I stopped the night with my new-found friends at Oisterwijk, who were surprised and delighted at my unexpected appearance. They complimented me on the exploits of the Highland Division, the fortunes of which they had followed closely in the news.

"But we always thought of the casualties that must have gone with your victories," said Mr. M. "I fear that you must have lost some of those fine-looking officers that used to stride up and down this road in their kilts?"

"Yes," I said. "Twenty-nine of them."

"And the young lieutenant who came to this house?" they asked.

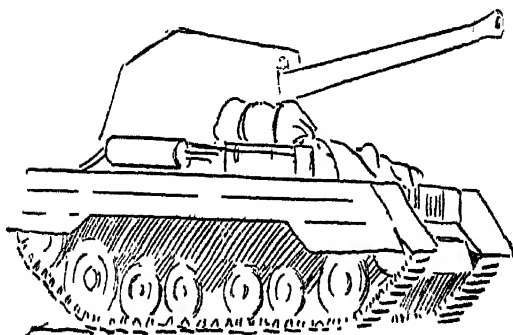
"He was killed at Goch," I replied, somewhat shortly.

So after that we talked about London (Mrs. M. used to show her Airedales at Crufts every season), and the Riviera and Vienna, and hardly at all about the war. What a joy it was to be with a cultured family once again. Besides, they have a most engaging habit of drinking claret from about seven o'clock right through till bedtime. When the evening came to an end my hostess took me upstairs to show me my room. As we shook hands and said good-bye (for I was starting at daybreak this morning) she put her other hand over mine and looked at me in a manner which I can only describe as compassionate. She is some ten years older than me and perhaps was thinking "Shall we ever see this young man again?" She is a woman with great sweetness of character and great charm. For a second, as we stood there looking at each other, I felt that anything might happen. Then the spell was broken. I opened the door of my room and she turned and went downstairs to her husband.

The armour was committed at nine o'clock this morning and I returned to the Battalion to find it engulfed by a great wave of optimism. Every one seems to think the war is over. Apparently we are to follow the Guards Armoured Division and protect the

left flank against the three enemy divisions still in Holland. It is said that the armour is not meeting much organised resistance and that it is chiefly blown bridges and craters that are delaying them.

I gather that once we get to Hamburg the Brigade has 200 square miles to police, and then we settle down to post-war soldiering, i.e., bakery and brick-laying classes and the like!



S. P. Gun

April 1st.

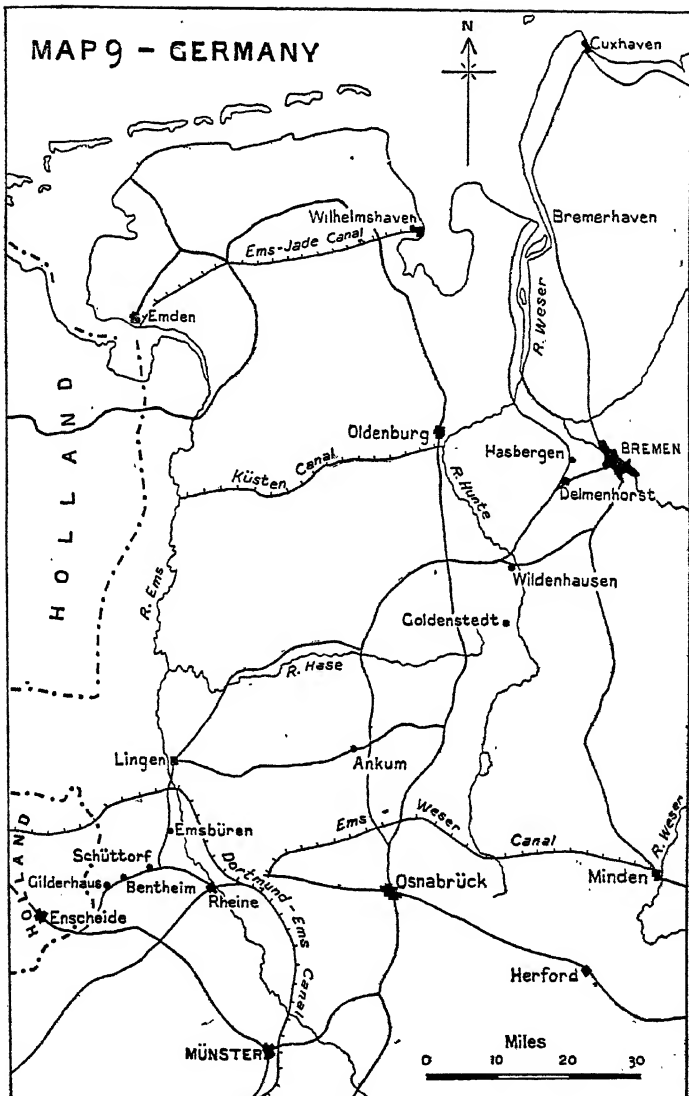
YESTERDAY I was sent off again, to Brussels this time and have just got back from there. It was due to our having been told that eleven out of the twelve recommendations for M.M.'s which we put in after Veritable have been turned down. It is simply monstrous and everybody who knows of it is speechless with rage. Especially as four officers have received awards recently—the C.O., George Morrison, Alec and myself. It looks so bad, as if we just write citations for each other and don't bother about the men, and it is really only because of their bravery and devotion to duty that an officer can qualify for an award at all. This is really just the last straw to a situation which has been extremely unsatisfactory for a long time.

To give men something in lieu of the decorations they deserve and cannot get, the C.O. had ordered some "*honoris causa*" cards to be printed. The wording under the regimental crest is, "Awarded to — in recognition of gallant and distinguished conduct on the battlefield," and it will be something which a man can frame and treasure. I think it is a very good idea. We placed the order in Brussels some weeks ago, with no great results so far, and now with the rejection of these eleven citations the matter has become of a sudden much more pressing. So I went down to Brussels to pass the proof and bring back the printed cards, but when I got there I found that the work was being done in Antwerp, the Brussels shop hadn't got a proof and, as it was Easter Saturday, nothing more could be done until the following Wednesday. I stopped the night at the Palace: a haircut, shampoo and two baths, but otherwise 400 miles for nothing.

April 2nd.

I visited Harry this afternoon. He said that the great difference he found on leaving us for 15th Scottish was how much fresher

MAP 9 - GERMANY



they all are than us, as the result of not having had the desert campaign before this one.

I drove through the area where our gliders landed eight days ago and was horrified to see that about half had crashed or were burnt out. The landings were a tremendous success and all the objectives were taken, but I have heard that the gliders were badly shot up in the air on the way down, as they landed among the German gun-lines and there was a lot of flak. But no doubt a number were burnt out in the normal course of shelling after the men were out of them.

I went on to tea with 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers, which was commanded by Winston for a time in the last war. Ian Mackenzie, who has been C.O. for the last six months, is a great little man. He's only thirty and has done brilliantly. But I wouldn't have recognised him for the gay, handsome chap he was when we two crossed the Channel together to join the B.L.A. on that sunny July day so many years ago. He looks ten years older; in fact, I had to look at his badges of rank when he came into the room. He admits he always feels tired nowadays. Like us, they are resting and wondering what is going to happen next, and hoping nothing. Also hoping that some of the other divisions will be given a chance to fight now, such as the 5th, who have arrived over from Italy, having had fewer casualties in three years than we have had in nine months, and 49th, who have sat on their bottoms on the Island and done nothing since last November—or so it seems to us.

After supper to-night we had a discussion on the merits of the various divisions over here, and amused ourselves by making a list as we thought it would come out if Monty and Dempsey and the Corps Commanders sat down and put them in order of priority for efficiency and effectiveness. We made it in two columns, one for August 1st last and one for to-day, and this is how it worked out:

<i>On August 1st, 1944</i>	<i>On April 1st, 1945</i>
1. 3rd (British)	1. 51st Highland
2. 15th Scottish	2. 15th Scottish
3. 50th (Northumbrian)	3. 3rd

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 4. 43rd (Wessex) | 4. 43rd |
| 5. 53rd (Welsh) | 5. 53rd |
| 6. 51st Highland | 6. 52nd (who have not had |
| 7. 49th (West Riding) | much of a chance yet) |
| | 7. 49th ¹ |
| And the armour: 1st | 11th |
| 2nd | Guards |
| 3rd | 7th ("Desert Rats") |

We have just been put at six hours' notice, so things cannot be going too well. Certainly we are all rather disappointed at what a short distance the armour has got in four days, but it is very easy to be critical from back here.

April 4th.

I came on to Enschede in Holland to-day, with the companies' advance parties. Here we saw something I have never seen before: masses and masses of flowers in the front windows of each house, banked up on the sill like a florist's display, though whether it is for Easter or Eisenhower no man can say. At any rate they have been liberated only two days and this nice little Dutch industrial town (weaving) is full of the usual thrilling stories. One was of a Dutch girl, the widow of an English colonel who went down in a ship sunk by U-Boat. She was landed here by parachute with a Dutch officer and a wireless set just before Arnhem, expecting that British forces would get through to them in a fortnight. But we didn't, and she and the Dutch officer transmitted information back until the Huns caught them three months later. Another was of the underground leader who had done excellent work all the time, but came up prematurely on hearing that the British were around, so that the Huns got him too. And how they surrounded the town in October and took 11,000 men between seventeen and fifty-five to work in Germany. But the story I like best is that of the German tank colonel. The Dutch had their flags out and were dancing all over the streets, celebrating the

¹ This, in retrospect, seems very hard on 49th Division. Through no fault of theirs they were kept static on the 'island' for five months, where they had little chance of distinguishing themselves. All the infantry divisions of B.L.A. were good. The best British division was probably 6th Airborne.

departure of the invaders. Then a German tank stopped, a colonel put his head and shoulders out and said pompously: "Nein, meine liebe Menschen, das Schauspiel ist nicht beendet" (My friends, the play is not yet over), then bobbed back into his tank, slammed down the turret and drove on.

April 5th.

We had a wonderful welcome at Enschede and all the troops were going to have been very comfortable, billeted two or three in each house, but to-day we got word to go on and meet the Battalion at Bentheim, thirty miles over the German border.

There were not many signs of fighting having taken place on the way up, but we passed a score of brewed-up lorries and half-tracks which had been ditched at the side of the road after being destroyed by the R.A.F. As we got nearer Bentheim we overtook a number of tanks that had been hit, and heard that the Grenadiers and Irish had lost about six each. The paraboys had again fought fanatically, and a young captain in the Irish Guards with a D.S.O. told me that two of their tank crews which had baled out had been shot, including Fitzherbert, the squadron commander. We began to discuss casualties in general and he was horrified, in fact almost unbelieving, when I told him that we have lost over seventy officers in battle since D-Day. I gathered that the average losses of officers in the Guards Armoured Division is in the twenties or thirties.

We are now for the first time in a German area which is inhabited, and so for the first time put into effect our instructions about turning Germans out of the houses we are to occupy. As I had gone ahead with the advance party this largely fell to me, and I must say I felt a bit of a cad, especially on one occasion when I found that the farmer's wife to whom I was talking was a pleasant young Englishwoman from Dulwich, whose infant son had been killed by our bombing of Emden. There are no limits to the brutalities I could inflict upon the young males, but it does not seem natural to have to regiment women. It is best to give this job to the Dutch interpreters. They find nothing difficult about it and show no mercy.

April 6th.

5th B.W. and 5-7th are batting to-day and we go through to-morrow—mopping up west of the Dortmund-Ems Canal.

We have been discussing what an extraordinarily efficient machine the British Army is to-day. It is all the more remarkable considering what a small proportion—I think less than two per cent.—of officers in the service to-day are regulars. It is organised in three broad departments: G, A, and Q. G (General Staff) is operations and training; A (Adjutant-General) is everything to do with personnel, and Q (Quartermaster-General) is supplies of all kinds. I think most army officers have great confidence in G and Q. To the ordinary fighting soldier the operational planning and execution of the present campaign has seemed nothing short of brilliant, and we are full of praise for the way the supplies have always come up. Shortcomings in equipment such as the defects of our tanks and tank equipment (and it is difficult to put one's finger on any other notable deficiencies) are more the responsibility of the Ministry of Supply than of the Quartermaster-General of the army. But some of the shortcomings in A can hardly fail to be obvious to everybody. To list a few examples:

(a) The monstrously inadequate distribution of awards to other ranks.

(b) The bog-up over the 1939-43 Star. The Prime Minister's official announcement in the House of Commons in August, 1943, said that men who had taken part in an evacuation would qualify. It then took the authorities four months to print the ribbon and draft the regulations, and when these were published it was found that only those who had received a decoration or mention in despatches in a campaign which ended in evacuation qualified. This mistake caused such an uproar from the scores of thousands who had been promised the ribbon and were now to be excluded that a "War Office spokesman" was quickly put up to say that new regulations were being prepared.

(c) The lack of any effective scheme for posting home tired-out N.C.O.'s and men who have done far more than their duty. (There was no such arrangement until very recently, and now it

all hangs on men coming out from home to take their place, but these replacements just do not arrive.)

(d) The abortive leave-home-to-breed scheme for M.E.F. which caused such a clamour that it had to be hurriedly dropped.

(e) Desertion in the field of battle and cowardice in the face of the enemy have been treated as comparatively minor military delinquencies, and the men have had every reason to think that these are not regarded as very serious offences. The maximum paper sentence was three years and few men actually served six months. The result is that there are 190 men awaiting trial in the Divisional cage on yesterday's count. Now, after ten months, it is suddenly announced that they will serve their sentences (and a court can award up to fifteen years) in full.

(f) The refusal to authorise a collar and tie in uniform for other ranks until some quarter of a century after the R.A.F. has had this very much prized privilege.

(g) The regulation that other ranks will salute officers at all times and places; or, if this regulation is necessary, the failure to enforce it. Naval ratings are not expected to salute their officers in the streets of London. Either the Army Council should likewise qualify the regulation (for example, limit it to other ranks saluting officers of their own corps) or else it should be rigorously enforced. At the moment two out of three soldiers in any large town, well knowing the orders on the subject, deliberately and flagrantly avoid saluting. This is not good for discipline.

It is a pity that the Army, which shows such great efficiency in so many directions, should sometimes come such croppers over comparatively small matters in the sphere of human feelings. They cause far more resentment than the loss of battles.

April 7th.

Quite a nice little operation last night. We left Gilderhaus in the morning and went to a staging area in the top half of Schüttorf, which 5th B.W. entered yesterday, and where we had an evening meal. 5-7th Gordons were to open up the direct road from Schüttorf to Emsburen and started in the afternoon. We

were also directed on Emsburen but by a longer route, first going east and then turning northwards, so that between us we should clean up a wider area. The Recce Regiment were ahead of us, and the C.O. went off with two companies at about 5 p.m. while I stayed behind, listening on the wireless, and ready to send up what he required. I heard quite a lot of shelling in the distance, which was a sad disappointment as I'd hoped that the Huns had taken all their guns back with them to Bremen. So now I hoped the shelling was for the benefit of the 5-7th and not in aid of us. An hour or two went by, and I did not know what was happening. Then I got word to send up another company and the R.A.P. (that sounds bad, I thought), and then later to come up myself with Battalion H.Q. It was now 7.30 and getting pretty dark. I jeeped down a main road for three miles, followed by Jack Johnston in the wireless scout-car, George Forbes with his signallers, and one or two trucks containing a few more hangers-on. We turned off the main road, skirted round a huge bomb crater, and went on for what seemed ages up a very muddy lane, narrowly avoiding collision in the dark with the Recce, who were streaming back in the opposite direction. At the top of the lane a guide met us, to say that Battalion H.Q. was in the first farm on the left.

I walked down the lane until I saw the shape of it, silhouetted against the pattern of the stars. Then I turned up a path.* "Aye, Sir, it's a gey black nicht so ye'd best tak a daunder roon' the byre as the bla' oot ben the hoose is nae sae guid," said the dark shadow which proved to be McDonald on duty in front of the house. So I went through the cow-house, using my torch to avoid treading on the Jocks who lay sleeping on the hay between the two rows of gleaming eyes; for the cows, too, were all lying down, chewing and slobbering over the cud, flicking their ears and occasionally jerking the chains round their necks. I stepped gingerly over the sprawling bodies that lay there like the dead, and over their rifles and wireless sets, steel helmets and stretchers until I reached the door at the far end, which led directly to the central living-room of the farmhouse. The C.O. sat at the small kitchen table, which was barely large enough for all that was on it: two maps and two sets of R/t microphones and earphones, a Tilley lamp, his tam o' shanter, field-glasses and gloves, several

cups and plates. The small room was already overcrowded, but somebody gave me a chair. As usual, it was indescribably untidy, with all the household chattels that the German family had been using until we turned them out into the house next door. So, mixed up with our weapons and equipment there were dirty dishes, cooking utensils, knitting, underclothing and children's toys. Neil was brewing up. Cornish soon went on the prowl and returned with an enormous basket of eggs which had eluded all previous search parties, and the few of us who kept vigil through the night—the C.O. and I and two or three signallers—had four eggs apiece about 4 a.m., and never have eggs tasted better.

The operation seemed to be going well. Companies moved successively up the roads and lanes, and each one was only moved forward when those in front were firm. There were the usual difficulties of wireless communications, and it was hard to get information, but it became more and more evident that there were very few enemy abroad. About 4.30 a.m. the C.O. moved forward to C Company's farmhouse, and an hour later came up on the air and said he wanted me. So I drove up the road towards him. By now it was getting light and I saw that it was most attractive country: rolling grassland, woods and fine old farmhouses, surrounded by stately beeches. I met Alec Lumsden at the roadside just in front of C Company's farm, looking down into a slit-trench.

"Look at this sod," he said. "The first we knew of him being here was when we were challenged in German. This is where the grenade landed right under his chin."

Huddled at the bottom of the trench I saw the mess that a few hours before had been a German soldier's.

Inside I found the Colonel, and he told me to go along the road and see that the sappers were doing their best to open it up, and then to come back and let him know as soon as transport could get through, so that B, A and D Companies could have their breakfasts sent up. It was a lovely spring morning and, with the sun rising and the beauty of the countryside, I felt pretty good. So, I think, did Cornish and Akers. But we had not gone far before we came upon a brewed-up jeep by a road crater, terribly

smashed. Bill McFarlan was trying to salvage what he could of the things that had been blown out when the jeep blew up on a R-mine. Both his and George's personal kit had been in the jeep, and the company telephone and wireless set and so on. I was horrified to see the damage done to the car and the great pool of blood in the middle of the road. Cornish did not need to be told to put some sand on it. Sandbags had not saved poor Morrison from being killed instantly, such is the damage done by this powerful mine. Morrison was one of the best type of old soldiers in the Battalion and his greatest friend was Neil, the C.O.'s jeep driver. B Company's real jeep driver is Private Watts, M.M., but now he was on leave in Scotland, and Morrison had come up from B Echelon to take his place for a few days. Such are the chances of war! I wandered up the road on foot to see what obstacles there might be. Then I came across a severed foot in an army boot. Forty yards further on I found two sappers lifting more R-mines, and the dreadfully mutilated body of a man by the side of another road crater. One of the mines had been booby-trapped, the sappers explained to me. A string had been tied from the igniter to the bank at the side of the road, and when a man from B Company, who had lost his way, walked along the verge it was set off.

"I wouldn't care for your job," I said to them, and walked on a little further. In Emsburen I found the 5-7th, who had entered it from the west.

Emsburen seems a nice little place and we gather that we may be here a few days. The sappers are building a bridge beyond it, covered by our A Company and the Recce. It is all very peaceful.

April 8th.

We have a nice H.Q. in a modern house, built and owned by a building contractor. It even has a bath in it. The weather is lovely and the war seems a long way away. There is an unlimited supply of eggs in this part of the country at this season. The Jocks have learnt how high the standing of officers is in Germany, and that it pays a dividend to go round the houses asking for "eggs for the officer."

Ewen tells me that there is a memorial in the church to all those of this parish who have been killed in this war and the last, with names and dates. It shows that whereas in the last war the death-roll was forty, in this one it is already forty-two (all but three of whom have been killed in Russia). In addition there must also be a large number of missing who have actually been killed but are not yet shown as such. So if this small village is any guide to German casualties as a whole, they have been at least as heavy in this war as in the last. Whereas ours have fortunately been very much less. The most recent figures given in answer to a question in Parliament are (U.K. only): last war killed 812,000, this war 216,000.

April 9th.

This morning I had a drive round some outlying farms which might have been missed out, to look for German deserters. We didn't find any, but lots of Polish, French, Italian, Russian, Dutch and even Greek workers. Cornish and I came to the conclusion that most of them were pretty comfortably off in these farms. We took one small porker into protective custody. I was careful to explain that the German Army had stolen everything in Europe, and therefore they had no grounds for complaint.

Court martial proceedings in the case of one Private Smith came back to-night and I received two shocks. Firstly, that the Army Commander, no less a person than the great Dempsey himself, had signed and dated the proceedings in two places and initialled in a third. It is fantastic to think that the commander of an army has to spend time, and it must be many hours a week, on considering and confirming courts martial sentences on private soldiers. And secondly, I was astonished to see that he has confirmed the sentence of ten years passed by the Court. Astonished because I doubt very much whether we should have passed such a sentence had we had the slightest reason to think that it would be confirmed. It was a bad case in that he and five other men who joined the Battalion from the Queens all deserted the night they arrived, on learning that the Battalion was to attack Goch next day. Against this was the fact that he had fought well in North Africa and had previously had an excellent

character. The fact is that courts martial sentences for desertion are regarded by the courts, and indeed by the fighting officers and men, as being in an inflated and debased currency (like the fifty-million mark note I picked up a few days ago; I thought it would be a nice souvenir for Lindsay *ma* until I turned it over and saw the purpose for which the back of it had been used). Thus a court martial passes a sentence of seven or ten years which hitherto the Army Commander has almost always reduced to three, and after about six months the sentence is suspended. So it has been the practice of courts martial to take this into account, and if one wanted to get a man, say, six or four years, to pass sentences of fifteen or ten years respectively. Now, without any warning at the time we tried him that there had been a change of policy, the full sentence on Smith has been confirmed, and I feel somewhat sorry for him.

5th B.W. lost seven of their pioneers to-day in an unlucky accident. There is a big drive on foot to round up all the Bosche mines which are lying at the side of the road, lest "evil disposed persons" (as Childs say on the front of their cheque-books) should lay them again in our wake. These men were throwing some R-mines into a pond when one detonated and exploded the others, killing four men and wounding three more.

April 10th.

Still here, and how nice it is!

It is an odd situation, for we don't know whether we have fought our last battle and only a little gentle mopping-up remains, or whether there is still a lot of stiff fighting ahead of us. This may well be so, since we are routed on Bremen and the Hun is reported to have two para divisions there (even though without their paras) and to have brought up a marine division from Hamburg. I feel that we should take the last pockets slowly, and not lose a man more than we can help. By this I mean send over every bomber we possess until there is nothing left, and then turn to the next place. But I am not sure that this is what the public want. They want the war to be finished as quickly as possible. Unfortunately they have already been told by the Press that it is virtually over.

It is said that there are 130,000 dozen bottles of bubbly in Bremen, but it has been suggested that this is a rumour in order to encourage us to capture the place more quickly.

7th Armoured Division has certainly staged a come-back in getting to the outskirts of Bremen in two days, and to-night the news says that the Americans have reached Magdeburg. The last satisfactory looting of Magdeburg was in 1650, under Count Tilley, when I believe it surpassed all records both before and since.

April 11th.

There is a good deal of chat nowadays at all levels about the army's two most serious problems, fraternization and looting.

Very strict instructions have been given about fraternization, which has been defined for us as:

(a) Talking (except on duty), laughing and eating with Germans.

(b) Playing games with them.

(c) Giving them food or chocolate, even to children.

(d) Shaking hands with them.

(e) Allowing children to climb on a car.

(f) Sharing a house with them.

All this is quite right and one only hopes it can be enforced as it is completely contrary to the nature of the British soldier.

Looting presents a greater problem since it is so hard to define. Difficulties arise over such articles as cars, food, luxuries like eggs and fruit, prohibited articles such as cameras and shot-guns, and wine. We have more or less come to agreement amongst ourselves that we are going to take only:

(a) What is necessary to make ourselves more comfortable, such as bedding or furniture.

(b) Luxuries that the Huns can well get on without, e.g., eggs and fruit, but not food such as meat or poultry.

(c) Forbidden articles we want for our own personal use, such as shot-guns, cartridges, cameras, field-glasses.

(d) Wine (which is mostly looted from France already).

There has been an anti-looting strafe at Brigade H.Q. to-day and the Commander has ordered that nothing which is not an

article of army rations is to be served in their mess. The Brigade Major told me that while the Commander was pinned down, as it were, on the throne this morning a Jock of his H.Q. passed his field of vision with a side of bacon, followed shortly after by another with a wireless set, followed a few minutes later by a third with a goose under his arm. Whereupon he rose in his wrath, sent for his B.M. and issued several fresh edicts, the effect of which is that there will probably be no looting at Brigade H.Q. for at least a fortnight.

April 12th.

We are on the move again.

To-day we have arrived at a place called Ankum, and the Battalion is installed in most attractive old farmhouses. This is lovely country, like Sussex at its best, and for two or three weeks the weather has been perfect. I gather that the Canadians are now going to take Bremen and 51st Division Hamburg. Nobody will much mind missing Bremen as it looks as if it will be tough. Intelligence says that the Burgomaster was against any further resistance and wanted to surrender the city, but they put in the S.S., who shot him. The Americans are now sixty miles from Berlin, good going.

April 13th.

We have moved on again to Goldenstet. But when we arrived we found that 5th Seaforths were doing an attack from here, starting at 5 p.m. So for a few hours we had to wait outside and then gradually filtered in as they moved out. Our H.Q. farmhouse has great dignity and charm and we would not mind staying here for a little. It also has electricity run from a mill at the end of the garden. This evening we had three unusual visitors. The first was a woman to complain that the German Army had stolen her two horses! Then a brace of communists: they had been in concentration camps off and on for years; in the off periods they had listened to the B.B.C. and been told that as soon as the Allies arrived they should come forward and offer their assistance; they could give us a list of all the strong Nazi types in the district, and only that morning had they seen a

perfectly good German soldier walking through the village in civilian clothes. We shall send them both back to the nearest military government detachment to-morrow.

A German girl to-day said: "We know quite well that the Highland Division is the Scottish S.S. You needn't think you can hide the fact. But we think you are worse than the S.S., who did at least take us into the long grass."

April 14th.

To-day we took over from 2nd Lincolns to allow 3rd Division to concentrate. I had lunch with Firbank, the C.O. We both agreed that we are very tired and, as he put it, rather like steeple-chase riders who begin to feel that they are getting stiff and elderly and that it is time to give way to younger men.

The farm we took over was typical of many we have seen, a substantial house built in the nineteen-twenties. Farming would seem to be prosperous in Germany: all the farms we see are in good repair and well stocked (all the cattle being black and white Frisians; I haven't seen a red cow in Germany). The cottages are all extremely good and a very large number have been built in the thirties: I can think of many farm-workers' cottages in Britain which are a sad sight in comparison. Of course there has never been any doubt that Hitler's crowd were most efficient administrators, and that if only he hadn't been such a gangster he would have been one of the great men in world history.

April 15th.

To-day we had to open up the road north of Wildenhausen, twenty miles from Bremen. It took a long time owing to a delaying combination of S.P. guns and road mines. In fact, the enemy fought an efficient little rearguard action; how incredible it is that he is still fighting us so energetically, right in the heart of Germany, though he well knows that the war is irretrievably lost. This advance of two or three miles caused us to lose more good men. Howitt was blown up in a carrier and Sergeant Howes was killed, shot through the head. I'd taken a great liking

to Howitt. He was an elderly subaltern, nearly forty, but his heart was in the right place. He and his brother joined us together on February 14th. Charles was killed four days later and now Jake is dead too. Sergeant Howes was a fine N.C.O. and commanded a platoon in C Company in many actions after his officers had become casualties. He was one of those for whom we tried unsuccessfully to get a M.M. after Veritable. We also lost Donald, a stretcher-bearer in C Company since El Alamein, hit in the back of the head by a piece of metal flying from a tank, itself hit by an S.P. gun.

April 16th.

We are sitting in the garden, basking in the sun. I have come back from visiting Alec Lumsden and found him fuming about the stickiness of the tanks supporting him yesterday. He says he nearly put the troop commander under arrest.

The General has just been in and said we are now for Hamburg. 3rd Division will attack from the west and 51st Division simultaneously from the east. That oughtn't to be too bad, for between us we are bound to overrun the enemy gun-lines, except for any in the middle of the city, and they might not be very effective after two or three days' preliminary heavy bombing. It is due to start on April 21st, but the General doesn't think they can make this date, so perhaps it will be the 23rd or 24th. And I go on leave on the 26th!

It is noticeable how very slow even the simplest operations have now become, and because of this we may have a difficult task during the next month. Everybody has a prejudice against being killed in the last month of a six-years' war. So people are playing for safety with one eye upon the clock—no hitting for sixes. But even this does not stop men dying. George Clark, our doctor, visited the C.C.P. this afternoon and says that 5th B.W., who were moving forward on our left, had forty-two casualties through the C.C.P. to-day, including Graham Pilcher, badly wounded, and of course this doesn't include the dead.

I had to go to the A.F. 3808 file to-day—the weekly return of officers. It occurred to me to count the number of officers who have served in the Battalion since D-Day. Up to March 27th,

the end of Operation Plunder, it is 102 (the average number of officers on the strength of the Battalion at any one time was about 30). I found that we have had 55 officers commanding the twelve rifle platoons, and that their average service with the Battalion was thirty-eight days, or five and a half weeks. Of these fifty-three per cent were wounded, twenty-four per cent killed or died of wounds, fifteen per cent invalided, and five per cent. had survived.

April 17th.

43rd Division took over from us to-day and we have moved to some nice farmhouses not far away. Arriving here I saw a tank crew sitting in a group round an attractive young woman. I got out of my jeep and went over to them. "You know this is forbidden," I said. "What is your name, Sergeant? Show me your pay-book."

"Sergeant Clive, Sir," he said, standing very respectfully to attention. And then, when I had written down his number, name and unit, "She's Russian." So, after I had satisfied myself that this was indeed the case, I had no option but to apologise!

The plot has changed again and 153 Brigade is now to take Delmenhorst. This is a fair-sized town, several times the size of Rees, and four or five miles west of Bremen. Unfortunately it is well within range of all the artillery that the Hun has got back and grouped together for the defence of Bremen, and is to be done as a preliminary operation before the heavy bombing.

April 18th.

Basking in the sun most of the day while 154 and 152 Brigades are batting. The Great Trek is on—a migration of the Russians eastwards. A steady stream of them has been going past all day, little groups of three or four men, carrying their pitiful little bundles or pulling them in handcarts or prams. I wonder whether they know where exactly they are going and how long it will take, or whether they are just simple folk trekking eastwards by the sun.

We have been living well lately with the profusion of eggs

and, best of all, a good stock of red wine we captured at Wildenhäusen: Bordeaux, Chateau du Bouilh, 1937, which to our unsophisticated palates seems excellent. The servility of the Germans we have so far met does not suggest that there are administrative difficulties ahead. Wherever I have come upon road-blocks I have ordered the nearest Huns to remove them, and we have all been struck by the speed of their compliance—you barely have time to get back into the car before a party is on the way. Their general attitude has to some extent surprised us: they obey all orders, however unpleasant, with an appearance of willingness. I am sure that English householders given an hour to move out of a house would show either indignation or fear, and in either case would be quietly obstructive. But the Germans appear to revel in obedient co-operation.

What a lovely colourful countryside this is. The buds on the trees are all beginning to come out and the young leaves of the silver birches are a rich shade of light green. Most of the farm roofs are coral or carmine and the dazzling white blossom of the fruit-trees makes a beautiful contrast. To make the picture more perfect, there are great patches of yellow mustard streaked across the green landscape. No painter could have blended the colours more graphically.

April 19th.

I go on leave a week to-day, but a lot can happen in that time.

At breakfast the C.O. said that he thought that the plans would be changed again as there was so much shelling south of Delmenhorst during the night. However, last evening we got orders for recce parties, so this morning I went off to choose a forward assembly area in the woods where 5th Seaforths are. I found that 152 have been having a very sticky time with the 15th Panzer Grenadiers in front of them fighting hard. There has been a good deal of shelling and I heard Moaning Minnie rumbling away in the distance.

Now I am back again among the daisies and dandelions on the front lawn.

"No move to-morrow" has just come in. This means that the commanders are all in a huddle, trying to decide what to do next.

April 20th.

It has been an extraordinary day.

It started with a super-conference at Division. The Corps Commander was present as well as the Divisional Commander and seven brigadiers. After much talk, a tremendous plan was produced for the capture of Delmenhorst. But before they had all dispersed word came in that the town was empty. The Hun had pulled right out during the night, so we in due course were ordered to motor in. We drove into the town and, to our astonishment, found ourselves being waved to and cheered, just as in the old days when we liberated Belgium and Holland. The girls proved to be Russians and Poles, who have been imported to work in the local jute-spinning and aircraft factories.

We expected to get heavily shelled from all the big guns mounted round Bremen, but all was quiet and we wondered why. Later we were told that there are 2,000 wounded Bosches in the hospitals here, so they declared it an open town. Anyway we moved in and made ourselves pretty comfortable. Anti-tank guns are pointing down the streets and the foremost section posts are manned, but most other people will be sleeping in beds to-night. Later in the day there was a little desultory shelling on the exits to the north, but we have only had one casualty, a poor lad of nineteen shot through the stomach on a patrol. We have a very nice H.Q. in the house of one Dr. Richter. The herr doktor has a most comfortable study, but I have not as yet been able to locate his cigars.

About teatime we were told that we probably had to take Hadsbergen, a small village two miles north-east of here. We didn't much care for the idea as it might easily have meant fifty or sixty casualties, as there are several S.P. guns up that way, in addition to the usual shelling, mortaring and spandau fire. Moreover, we couldn't see much point in it as Hasbergen is a dead-end place, leading nowhere.

So we were overjoyed when the Colonel came back from a Brigade O Group to say that all we are now required to do is to patrol forward. Also that 3rd, 43rd and 52nd Divisions are to capture Bremen, and as 12th Corps are taking Hamburg we are not for that either. What a let off!

I am now beginning to think that I really shall make my leave getaway in six days' time. Bruce said that to-day for the first time he saw his C.S.M. duck when a shell came over; then he remembered that he is also in the next leave party!

April 21st.

The Russians are four miles from Unter den Linden.

April 22nd.

All is very quiet and peaceful. We have done a little patrolling during the last two days, just to keep contact with the enemy. The Huns are still there in front of us, but not being at all offensive and nor are we, though any undue movement on their part is promptly shelled. A few deserters trickle in from time to time. They include the former mistress of the Commander of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division; the latest intelligence summary says that the Field Security Section are checking her form. The last two deserters have been Gef. Berger of 2nd Grenadier Regiment (the present strength of this company is ten, he says, and they are commanded by Lieut. Bloem, but he has not been seen for a few days) and Gef. Hauff of 1st Company, 683 Anti-Tank Regiment. The normal establishment of his company, he tells us, is thirty-five vehicles and nine 88 m.m. guns, but at the moment it has two guns, two trucks and no petrol. The company, forty strong, was put in the line three days ago, but twenty-five have since deserted. From P.O.W. we gather that the nearest company to us belongs to a marine battalion and is commanded by a U-Boat petty officer. To such shifts is the German Army now reduced.

Last night we fired 4,000 leaflet shells over Bremen, telling them to surrender. To-day, at 5 p.m., the first bombing, by several hundred Lancasters and Fortresses, took place. The C.O., Ewen and I went up to our O.P. at the top of the factory to watch it.

Meanwhile the Russians are fighting in the heart of Berlin. Stuttgart and Nuremberg have fallen, and east and west may join up at any moment.

April 23rd.

We heard to-day that the whole Brigade is allowed only six awards (including officers) for the Rhine crossing and subsequent fighting, so once again our efforts to obtain decorations for the Jocks have been almost entirely frustrated. On top of the February operations from the Reichswald to Goch, for which none of our Jocks have received decorations although twelve were recommended, it is a scandal.

The magnitude of the scandal can best be shown by a comparison with the R.A.F. 153 Infantry Brigade's assault crossing of the Rhine was as important as any single air operation such as the breaching of the Mohne Dam or the sinking of the *Tirpitz*. I do not know anything about the Mohne Dam, but the sinking of the *Tirpitz* did not affect the end of the war in the same way that the crossing of the Rhine did. During this operation 153 Brigade had, say, 1,500 men in close contact with the enemy, on a calculation of 500 in each of the three infantry battalions, of which 230, or fifteen per cent., became casualties (1st Gordons seventy-eight, 5th B.W. sixty-five, 5-7th Gordons eighty-seven). Our allowance of six decorations for the whole Brigade is 0.4 per cent of those in close contact. Don't tell me that only 0.4 per cent or even four per cent of the air-crews engaged on either of those two operations were decorated? It is much more likely to have been forty per cent.¹

I am getting ready for my departure the day after to-morrow. I've got hold of a small Opel which the Huns have abandoned, and intend to drive it the whole way to Brussels and get a lift by air from there. This should be more fun than two days in the leave-party lorry and then the train from Gennep. I shall start at 3 a.m. as it is a long journey.

April 24th.

Bruce tells me that quite a nice young German hospital nurse came to see him in his Company H.Q. He showed her the pictures

¹ In answer to a question in Parliament on November 26th, 1945, the Under-Secretary of State for Air informed me that immediate awards were granted to 31 per cent of the members of air crews who took part in the operation against the Mohne Dam and to 7 per cent of those who took part in the sinking of the *Tirpitz*.

of the Buchenwald concentration camp. She looked horrified, then suddenly her face cleared. "But it's only the Jews," she said.

Bill McFarlan has a factory and a lot of foreign workers in his area. One of them asked him whether in England we flog women who do not work satisfactorily. I visited the Military Government people to-day. They said that any respect they ever possessed for the Germans has entirely gone now.

Freyburg and Frankfurt have fallen and Stuttgart has been entered. We are fighting on the outskirts of Hamburg and Bremen. Patrols have reached the Swiss frontier.

The war in Europe is coming rapidly to an end.

April 25th and 26th.

It is midnight, or thereabouts, and I am sitting in the Herr Doktor's study in the nominal capacity of duty officer. But the telephones are silent; at the moment there is no duty to be done. And in three hours' time I start off on leave.

It is a good moment to take stock. For we are coming now to the end of an era. It will be more than a fortnight before I am back from England, and by that time Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen will have fallen and resistance in North Germany will be virtually over. I think there is no doubt that we have fought our last major engagement. When I return things will have begun to be very different.

The Herr Doktor's study is a good place in which to take stock, for it is symbolic of the school of thought we have come to destroy. The two most prominent pictures in it are Friedrich der Gross and Kaiser Wilhelm II, but there is an empty nail between them. There can be little doubt that on this hung Hitler's picture, hastily removed as we drove into the town. But if you talk politics with the Herr Doktor he will tell you that he is not a Nazi and does not like Hitler. It is most odd that of all the Germans I have spoken to, not one has ever been a Nazi. On his desk is a small metal flagstaff—but no flag. The swastika was also whipped away just in time, but there was no ready means of removing the one painted on the flagstone in front of the house, and there it remains: the crooked symbol of Nazi tyranny. The room is full of military souvenirs, from the 154

Infanterie Regiment epaulettes on the wall to the little bomber paperweight on his desk. Most significant of all, the bookcases against the wall contain a whole library of war books beginning, top left, with *The Battle of Hohenfriedberg, June 4th, 1866*, (the year that we passed our first Education Act), down through *World War in Pictures, 1914-18*, and ending, bottom right, with a book which we have found in almost every house, which has the sadistic title of *With Bombs and Machine Guns over Poland*.

This morning I asked the frau doktor what kind of doktorate her husband has, since there is no surgery in the house nor any indications of great learning. Her answer, though it is almost inconceivable, was that he is a doktor of philosophy!

The fruits of that philosophy can be seen in the pictures of German concentration camps which have appeared in the last few days: the slaughter yards stained the same dull crimson as the tulips in this room. They, too, are symbolic, for the little metal disc at the end of the row informed me this morning that these heavy red blooms—grown, you might well think, from blood and iron—are named “Reichskanzler Bismark.”

It is just ten and a half months since D-Day. The beaches and orchards of Calvados seem half a lifetime ago. We have certainly travelled far since then: the break-through south of Caen which took us across the Seine, the reduction of Le Havre, the woods north-west of Eindhoven and northwards from there to the Maas, the canal crossings, our sojourn on the “Island” north of Nijmegen, the hurried move down into the Ardennes, the break-through into the Reichswald and onwards to Goch, the Rhine crossing, and now the thrust forward into the very heart of Germany.

In the course of these journeyings we have fought some thirty-six actions, in all but two of which the Battalion has been attacking. The price has been seventy-five officers and 975¹ other ranks, of whom rather more than one-quarter have been killed or died of wounds. I shall never get over the sadness of these losses. To the day of my death I shall remember David Martin; George Stewart; Arthur Thomson; Donald Howorth, the best platoon

¹ The Battalion fought one more small action on April 28th which caused another eleven casualties among O.R.s, making 986 for the whole campaign.

commander that ever was; Albert Brown, our doctor; Glass, the young Canadian; Jimmy Graham, my first servant; "Carrots" Chamberlain, for so long my signaller, and Sergeants Dunlop and Coutts, together with General Thomas Rennie and many others, as gallant and lovely Highlanders as have ever been. I do not believe that anybody can go through a campaign with such men as these, and watch them be killed one after the other, and know that their joyous personalities are now but blackened, broken corpses tied up in a few feet of army blanket under the damp earth—and remain quite the same. For my part I feel that this has made a mark upon me that will never be effaced. It is as if some spring deep down inside me has run down.

Unfortunately those of us who have survived the killing will not be able to stop fighting in the years that lie ahead. Our biggest battles will be when the next generation wants to let bygones be bygones and give the Germans a fair chance. They will be powerfully assisted by all the intellectuals, who believe in the brotherhood of man and will clamour for reductions in the armed forces. Without the utmost vigilance on our part our comrades will have died in vain.

But I refuse to let such thoughts depress me now. For I can hear my driver warming up the engine of my borrowed car. Cornish has laid out my kilt and my pack stands there, all ready. It is time to go. In seventy-two hours Joyce will be waiting for me at the Dorchester. Park Lane, Bond Street, Piccadilly, then Long Sleddale with the children.

The ancient village taxi will draw up at the gate. I shall walk up the garden path and across the narrow, wooden footbridge over the Sprint, pausing a moment to look for trout in the pools and eddies below, then a few more yards up a slight rise to the house. At this time of year there will be great clusters of blue irises, in front of the pale yellow moorland stone. Ronald, Polly and young Oliver will be in bed and asleep. But, whatever their mother may say, I shall wake them.

I cannot remember ever having felt quite so excited before. I am a gay Gordon indeed.

APPENDIX I

A GLOSSARY OF MILITARY TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A Echelon.—The transport of an infantry battalion in the field is normally divided into three Echelons: F, A and B. F (or Fighting) is the minimum number of vehicles needed for battle: jeeps, carriers, anti-tank guns, etc. A Echelon consists mostly of 15-cwt. trucks containing day-to-day requirements such as food, reserve ammunition, blankets or greatcoats, cooking utensils. B Echelon contains all the remaining vehicles of the battalion, chiefly 3-ton lorries with stores, workshops, etc.; it only joins up with the battalion when out of the line for a resting or refitting period.

A.P.M.—Assistant Provost Marshal, the officer on the staff of certain formations who is responsible for disciplinary matters.

Artillery.—Though an infantry brigade may have several field and medium artillery regiments directly supporting it during the different phases of an attack, it has one field regiment (24 guns) permanently at its disposal and the regimental commander functions at Brigade H.Q. during an operation. Similarly each of the three 8-gun batteries in the regiment is allotted to one of the three battalions in the brigade, and the Battery Commander, a major, is at the side of the Battalion Commander throughout the action. He usually has one or two officers up with the companies as Forward Observation Officers (F.O.O.s). These artillery officers are always accompanied by their signallers in direct wireless touch with the guns. Thus, though the guns themselves may be several miles in rear, the Battery Commander, F.O.O.s and signallers share all the risks of the infantry. 127 Field Regiment supported 153 Brigade from El Alamein onwards and 301 Battery supported 1st Gordons. We thought the world of "our" gunners.

Avre.—Assault vehicle R.E. (or Petard). An armoured vehicle which fires a block-buster at concrete defences.

Bazooka.—A one-man portable projector which, by means of a spring, projects an anti-tank bomb about 100 yards. The bazooka is the American equivalent of the British piat.

B Echelon.—See A Echelon.

B.M.—Brigade Major, the senior operations staff officer at a Brigade H.Q.

Bofors.—Light anti-aircraft artillery.

Bren.—The British light machine-gun.

Buffalo.—An armoured amphibious transporter. For description see page 127.

B.W.—Black Watch.

Carrier.—A four-man tracked vehicle. A battalion has a platoon of them, each armed with one bren-gun—the “carrier platoon.” The mortars also move in carriers and the anti-tank guns are towed by them.

C.B.—Counter battery artillery fire.

C.C.P.—Casualty Collecting Point.

C.C.R.A.—Commanding Corps Royal Artillery—a brigadier.

C.C.S.—Casualty Clearing Station.

C.O.—Commanding Officer, usually a Lieut.-Col.’s appointment.

C.R.A.—Commanding Royal Artillery (of a division)—Brigadier.

C.R.E.—Commanding Royal Engineers (of a division)—Lieut.-Col.

Crocodiles.—Flame-throwing tanks.

C.S.M.—Company Sergeant-Major.

D.F.—Defensive Fire. Prearranged artillery and/or mortar fire which can be put down quickly in front of forward troops if they call for it. One or more D.F. tasks is often selected to be an S.O.S. task, which means that the weapon is actually laid to shoot there.

D.R.—Despatch Rider.

E.—18-set. The two-man portable R/t set which was carried by each company. Replaced by the 46-set.

F.D.L's.—Forward Defended Localities.

F Echelon.—See A Echelon.

Flail.—A tank with steel chains rotating in front of it and thrashing the ground in order to explode anti-tank mines.

F.O.O.—See Artillery.

H.E.—High Explosive.

H-Hour.—The same as Zero Hour.

I.O.—Intelligence Officer. A battalion has one I.O. with a section of about six men. He is the C.O.'s assistant in all operational matters.

Kangaroo.—A tank minus turret and innards, used as an armoured transporter.

K.O.S.B.—King's Own Scottish Borderers.

K.S.L.I.—King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

L.M.G.—Light Machine-gun.

L.Q.—Liaison Officer.

M.M.G.—Medium Machine-gun.

Mortar.—A projector with the appearance of a short length of steel drain-pipe fitting into a base-plate. A bomb slides down inside it to explode a propelling charge when it reaches the bottom. The 3-inch mortar fires a 10-lb. bomb one and a half miles, and the battalion has six of them.

M.T.—Mechanised Transport.

M.T.O.—Officer in Charge of M.T.

O Group.—Order Group. The Commanders and others in any formation required to receive or listen to orders before an operation. Thus a Brigade O Group consists of the three battalion commanders, the artillery, tank and other supporting arms commanders and the principal staff officers of the Brigade Commander. Similarly, a battalion O Group consists of the company and supporting arms commanders, I.O., S.O., Adj., M.O., etc.

O.P.—Observation Post.

Other Ranks.—Warrant Officers, N.C.O.s and Privates.

Piat.—Projector infantry anti-tank. The British equivalent of the bazooka (see above).

Priest.—A S.P. gun minus turret and innards, used like the kangaroo as an armoured transporter.

R.A.C.—Royal Armoured Corps. Formed from Cavalry and Yeomanry Regiments and the Royal Tank Corps into regiments or battalions of tanks, flails, crocodiles, buffaloes, kangaroos or priests.

R.A.P.—Regimental Aid Post.

R.E.—Royal Engineers (or Sappers). Each brigade normally has a field company commanded by a Major.

Recce.—Pronounced "rekky." Reconnaissance. To make a reconnaissance.

R/T.—Radio telephony (speech by wireless).

R. V.—Rendezvous.

R. W. F.—Royal Welch Fusiliers.

S. A. A.—Small Arms Ammunition.

Schmeisser.—The German equivalent of the Tommy-gun.

Schu-mine.—For description see page 125.

Sitrep.—A situation or progress report.

S.O.—Signal Officer.

S.O.S.—See D.F.

S.L.—Start Line.

S.P.—Self-propelled gun. An armoured field gun or anti-tank gun on a tank chassis. Also Start Point.

Spandau.—The German light machine-gun corresponding to our Bren.

Sten.—The British equivalent of the Tommy-gun.

Tac H.Q.—The C.O.'s battle H.Q., consisting usually of two jeeps or carriers containing his and the battery commander's signallers and wireless sets. When Tac H.Q. moves into a room or dug-out it is usually called a Command Post. Brigade and Divisional H.Q.s also split themselves into Tac and Main H.Q.s during an operation.

Track.—The bearing surface of any vehicle (e.g., tank or carrier) which does not run on wheels. All these are known as "tracked vehicles." Half-tracks are those which have tracks behind the driving wheels.

Weasel.—A small tracked vehicle somewhat similar to a carrier.

APPENDIX II

A ROLL OF OFFICERS WHO SERVED WITH 1ST BATTALION, THE
GORDON HIGHLANDERS, FROM D-DAY TO THE END OF HOSTILITIES.

Officers are shown in the ranks and with the decorations held on May 1st, 1945, and are placed in the order in which they joined the Battalion.

Abbreviations

K—Killed or died of wounds	I—Invalided
W—Wounded	P—Posted elsewhere
(W)—Wounded and remained on duty	R—Rejoined
	POW—Prisoner of War

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Joined</i>	<i>Quitted</i>
Major D. C. Thom	D-Day	K 19-6-44
Major A. Andrews	D-Day	W 11-7-44
Major J. M. Robertson, M.C.	..	D-Day	W 21-6-44
		R 7-8-44	P 26-1-45
Major B. D. M. Rae, M.C.	D-Day	W 26-10-44
		R 7-3-45	(W 23-3-45)
			(W 27-3-45)
Captain D. L. Urquhart, M.C.	..	D-Day	W 4-7-44
Major G. Morrison, D.S.O.	D-Day	
Major W. R. MacMillan, M.C.	..	D-Day	P 26-1-45
Captain (Q.M.) J. McG. Lindsay	..	D-Day	
Major J. Grant, M.C.	D-Day	K 19-8-44
Captain M. Morrison	D-Day	
Captain D. W. Martin	D-Day	K 29-10-44
Captain A. H. Gilchrist, M.C.	..	D-Day	(W 18-6-44)
			(W 9-7-44)
			W 18-7-44
Lieut. T. W. P. Hamlyn	D-Day	I 18-8-44

Lieut. D. A. McColl	D-Day	W 11-7-44
Lieut. J. Martin	D-Day	W 18-6-44
Lieut. G. I. Robertson	D-Day	K 20-7-44
Captain G. M. Clark, R.A.M.C.	D-Day	W 17-6-44
	R 10-1-45	
Major A. Lumsden, M.C.	D-Day	
Captain E. G. S. Traill, M.C.	D-Day	
Captain R. F. Williams	D-Day	
Captain G. B. Stewart	D-Day	(W 16-7-44)
		K 19-8-44
Major D. R. Reid, M.C.	D-Day	W 19-6-44
	R 31-7-44	W 23-8-44
	R 16-10-44	W 10-2-45
Captain N. Peters	D-Day	W 13-6-44
Captain G. C. Forbes	D-Day	W 13-6-44
	R 25-8-44	
Major M. B. Reekie, M.C.	D-Day	K 23-8-44
Lieut.-Col. W. A. Stevenson, D.S.O.	D-Day	W 11-7-44
Lieut. H. W. Glennie	D-Day	K 11-7-44
Captain R. B. Anderson	D-Day	W & POW 11-7-44
Lieut. J. T. McLaren	D-Day	W 18-6-44
Captain J. G. M. Birss, M.C.	D-Day	W 18-6-44
	R 21-6-44	W 19-8-44
Lieut. J. Maroulis	D-Day	I 21-7-44
Lieut. G. A. Duthie	D-Day	I 13-6-44
Lieut. G. A. Gilmour	D-Day	W 18-6-44
Lieut. J. Greenhalgh	D-Day	I 25-7-44
Lieut. W. M. Fisher	D-Day	P 7-1-45
Brig. The Hon. H. C. H. T. Cumming-		
Bruce, D.S.O.	D-Day	P 25-11-44
Major R. W. Petrie, M.C.	12-6-44	
Captain L. G. Keightley, M.C.	12-6-44	I 1-8-44
Lieut. J. E. J. Gallop	15-6-44	W 17-8-44
	R 20-2-45	W 20-2-45
Lieut. D. Howorth, M.C.	15-6-44	W 15-8-44
Captain A. Brown, R.A.M.C.	17-6-44	K 10-1-45
Lieut. C. Brown	24-6-44	W 11-7-44
	R 1-11-44	W 14-11-44

Lieut. H. Hayes	..	..	24-6-44	I 20-7-44
Lieut. G. A. McKay	..	..	13-7-44	I 27-7-44
Lieut. A. P. Donald	..	..	25-7-44	K 23-8-44
Lieut. W. F. Wisley	..	..	26-7-44	P 2-8-44
Lieut. H. A. Beardwell	..	..	26-7-44	W 23-8-44
Lieut. R. T. Foster	..	..	26-7-44	W 17-8-44
Lieut. G. Mitchell, M.C.	..	..	29-7-44	W 8-8-44
Major M. A. Lindsay, D.S.O.	..	..	31-7-44	W 1-11-44
			R 7-11-44	(W 21-2-45)
Lieut. E. D. Glass	..	..	2-8-44	K 15-8-44
Lieut. R. G. Gowar	..	..	6-8-44	W 17-8-44
			R 14-3-45	
Lieut. L. M. M. Needs	..	..	6-8-44	K 19-8-44
Lieut. A. Chappell	..	..	23-8-44	W 14-11-44
Lieut. G. M. Gray	..	..	26-8-44	W 26-10-44
			R 13-3-45	W 23-3-45
Captain J. B. Johnston	..	..	27-8-44	
Captain N. L. Smith	..	..	27-8-44	
Lieut. P. B. Ayres	..	..	27-8-44	W 11-2-45
Lieut. C. E. Morley	..	..	27-8-44	K 16-11-44
Captain F. G. Hopkins	..	..	10-9-44	W 12-2-45
Captain E. J. Frary	..	..	17-9-44	POW 12-2-45
Captain C. R. Clay	..	..	19-9-44	W 3-10-44
Captain D. A. V. Aldridge	..	..	19-9-44	
Lieut. P. W. Burnell	..	..	19-9-44	I 9-10-44
Lieut. P. E. C. Barbrooke	..	..	19-9-44	W 14-11-44
Lieut. J. G. Bickell	..	..	19-9-44	W 4-11-44
			R 5-11-44	I 26-3-45
Lieut. G. J. Heath	..	..	19-9-44	W 26-10-44
Captain D. C. Scott-Moncrieff	..	..	3-10-44	W 13-1-45
Major R. F. Davies	..	..	4-10-44	
Lieut. I. Edgar	..	..	22-11-44	K 21-2-45
Lieut. J. MacRae	..	..	22-11-44	W 13-2-45
			R 26-3-45	
Captain W. E. Kyle	..	..	22-11-44	POW 20-2-45
Lieut. J. A. MacPherson	..	..	22-11-44	(W 10-2-45)
				W 21-2-45

Lieut.-Col. J. A. Grant-Peterkin,						
D.S.O.	..	..	..	..	26-11-44	W 25-3-45
					R 27-3-45	
Lieut. W. G. Fraser	..	..	..	..	19-12-44	K 9-2-45
Lieut. J. B. Coupar	..	..	..	..	1-1-45	W 21-2-45
					R 26-3-45	
Lieut. F. Rushton	..	..	..	..	1-1-45	
Lieut. A. R. Porter	..	..	..	..	2-2-45	W 10-2-45
					R 26-2-45	K 25-3-45
Lieut. R. W. G. Macpherson..	..	..	..	..	7-2-45	W 23-2-45
Lieut. J. B. Thomson	..	..	..	..	7-2-45	
Lieut. W. J. Howitt	..	..	..	..	14-2-45	K 15-4-45
Lieut. C. C. Howitt	..	..	..	..	14-2-45	K 20-2-45
Major A. J. Thomson	..	..	..	..	15-2-45	K 19-2-45
Captain K. J. R. McDonald	..	..	..	..	15-2-45	W 23-3-45
Captain J. Anderson	..	..	..	..	15-2-45	I 10-4-45
Lieut. H. E. Harrison	..	..	..	..	16-2-45	W 20-2-45
Lieut. I. T. P. Ventris, M.C.	..	..	..	..	16-2-45	W 21-2-45
Lieut. B. M. Dench	..	..	..	..	16-2-45	
Lieut. J. G. Schofield	..	..	..	..	16-2-45	W 20-2-45
Captain R. L. Callan	..	..	..	..	19-2-45	P 8-3-45
Captain J. K. Hutchinson	..	..	..	..	21-2-45	
Lieut. V. M. Halleron	..	..	..	..	23-2-45	K 25-3-45
Lieut. N. M. Rowbotham	..	..	..	..	23-2-45	(W 27-3-45)
Lieut. G. D. Rollinson	..	..	..	..	23-2-45	
Lieut. A. K. MacDonald	..	..	..	..	23-2-45	K 25-3-45
Lieut. A. N. Stone	..	..	..	..	23-2-45	
Captain W. M. McFarlan, M.C.	..	..	..	..	24-2-45	
Lieut. L. Titterton	..	..	..	..	27-2-45	K 23-3-45
Lieut. P. G. Burrell	..	..	..	..	27-2-45	W 25-3-45
Lieut. A. Rodger	..	..	..	..	27-2-45	K 23-3-45
Lieut. N. Crockatt	..	..	..	..	31-3-45	
Lieut. R. A. Catchpole	..	..	..	..	31-3-45	
Lieut. S. S. Spraggs	..	..	..	..	31-3-45	
Lieut. D. Platt	..	..	..	..	31-3-45	
Captain T. E. Arnold	..	..	..	..	19-4-45	
Captain J. W. Ritchie, M.C.	..	..	..	..	26-4-45	

Summary

Officers served	..	..	..	106
Killed or died of wounds	..			21
Wounded and evacuated	..	..		51
Wounded and remained on duty				8
Wounded and P.O.W.		1
P.O.W.	2
Total battle casualties		83
Invalided	10

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